REDISCOVERING NARRATIVE: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF JOURNALISTIC STORYTELLING IN AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS, 1969-2001

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes the expansion of narrative journalism and the institutional change in the American newspaper industry in the last quarter of the 20th century. In doing so, it offers the first institutionally-situated history of narrative journalism's evolution from the New Journalism of the 1960s to longform literary journalism in the 1990s. This analysis shows that the New Journalism, contrary to popular beliefs, did indeed have a significant impact on daily news production in American newspapers. Yet, this study also demonstrates that the evolution of narrative techniques in late twentieth century American journalism was more nuanced, more purposeful and more institutionally based than the New Journalism myth suggests. When editors and journalists adapted narrative journalism in daily newspaper between the 1960s and the early 2000s, they responded to a variety of cultural and institutional influences and then developed a narrative news logic to mediate and channel these influences. Eventually, narrative journalism took shape as a distinct "cultural form of news," adding a novel way of reporting and writing the news in daily newspapers.

This dissertation examines how narrative innovations took hold in American newspapers and how in turn the production logic of newspapers affected narrative conventions. Relying on archival research, oral history interviews and textual analysis, this study traces and analyzes the emergence of narrative journalism in American newspapers

between the 1960s and the 1990s. A combination of individual efforts and institutional initiatives changed newsroom cultures, fostered an interpretive community and created rituals, establishing an alternative way of reporting and writing the news in American newspapers. This work offers a multi-layered description of how a new set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors emerged in journalism and how this novel news regime shaped the attitudes and practices of media producers and consumers in the late 20th century.

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Every dissertation has a backstory. While the result is discursive and organized, the process behind it is narrative and often serendipitous. The backstory would not really make for a bestseller but it certainly has all the ingredients of a good story: a character (me) is faced with obstacles (this dissertation) and overcomes these obstacles with the help of many people along the way. Here is where I would like to acknowledge all this help, support and encouragement.

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with his time. Most importantly, he was a very welcoming host. As much as I enjoyed the archives, I particularly relished talking to some of the people who were instrumental in expanding narrative journalism in American newsrooms. They are too many to list them in this section but their names are to be found in the references at the end of this dissertation. I sincerely thank all of them for their time and patience. I felt privileged to hear their stories. And true storytellers they are. I also want to thank some other great storytellers whose enthusiasm for my project always propelled me forward: my friends Jamie Lay, Lisa Heyamoto and Todd Milbourn. It is customary to thank members of the dissertation committee but a mere "Thank you" would not do justice to the immense insight, inspiration and encouragement that I have received from the four scholars on my dissertation team. Ellen Herman opened the world of cultural history to me and introduced me to some of the most erudite and enjoyable scholarship in American cultural history. Scott Maier provided space and support for finding my way through the terrain of journalism studies and alleviated my anxiety of math and statistics. Gretchen Soderlund helped me navigate the field of journalism history and provided insightful comments after reading numerous drafts. Lauren Kessler supported me all the way from the very beginning of the doctoral program and the word advisor does not even begin to capture her role in shaping how I think and write about narrative journalism. I want to acknowledge that no one has ever written more letters of recommendation for me than Lauren.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation analyzes the expansion of narrative journalism and the institutional change in the American newspaper industry in the last quarter of the 20th century. In doing so, it offers the first institutionally-situated history of narrative journalism's evolution from the New Journalism of the 1960s to longform literary journalism in the 1990s. My analysis shows that the New Journalism, contrary to popular beliefs, did indeed have a significant impact on daily news production in American newspapers. Yet, I also demonstrate that the evolution of narrative techniques in late twentieth century American journalism was more nuanced, more purposeful and more institutionally based than the New Journalism myth suggests.

After its beginnings in the late 19th century, narrative journalism in American newspapers only gained significant momentum in the second half of the 20th century. The genre first found an interested audience when the "New Journalists" (e.g. Tom Wolfe, Gay Tales, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson, Jimmy Breslin) of the 1960s and 1970s challenged journalistic conventions and re-introduced storytelling to news reporting.[1] When the *Washington Post* launched its Style section in 1969, it deliberately and systematically incorporated narrative techniques into its daily news production. During the 1970s, other newsrooms (e.g. *L.A. Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*) were also experimenting with storytelling formats but it was not until the end of that decade that the newspaper industry as such paid

[1] Thomas Bernard Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992; Thomas Bernard Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011); John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts 2000); Norman Sims, *The Literary Journalists* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984); Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

attention. In response to declining circulation numbers, the American Society for Newspaper Editors (ASNE) initiated efforts to improve writing and inaugurated writing awards in 1979. In the same year, feature writing was introduced as a category to the Pulitzer Prizes. By the 1980s, news organizations began pouring resources into the production of feature stories. They hired writing coaches, gave reporters more time to work on assignments and expanded weekend editions by adding narrative stories. The Poynter Institute, then evolving as the country's leading training center for mid-career journalists, became instrumental in promoting narrative writing at newspapers and by the 1990s other renowned training institutions like the American Press Institute and universities (Harvard University, University of Missouri, Boston University) held workshops and conferences about the benefits of storytelling.

As Christopher Daly noted, newspaper journalism in the middle of the 20th century "had a serious problem: most of it was boring."[2] Following the formula of the "inverted pyramid," news stories read like telegrams. The most "important" piece of information was squeezed into a lead sentence; the rest of the material was organized in order of decreasing importance.

A lot of that changed within a few decades. Newspapers rediscovered the power of storytelling and the potential of narrative techniques to make reading the newspaper enjoyable in addition to being informative. "Newspaper have become story papers,"[3] Michelle Weldon observed approvingly in 2008. From a critical perspective, Rodney Benson asserted that narrative had become "a doxa in American journalism."[4]

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[2] Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2012), 338.
[3] Michele Weldon, *Everyman News: The Changing American Front Page* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press), 1.
[4] Rodney Benson, *Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 208.

How did American newspapers change from gray and boring purveyors of information to lively (and some would argue overzealous) narrators of everyday life? When and why did news stories become less about delivering facts, and more about telling a story? These are the questions I seek to address in this historical study.

My research is situated at the intersection of journalism history and cultural history. I study how institutional and cultural changes affected the practice of journalism in the late 20th century and how, simultaneously, specific journalistic techniques, i.e. narrative and literary journalism, affected representations of current events and issues in American society. Narrative news writing broke with conventions, practices and rules of traditional news writing and advanced a particular form of storytelling as a format for journalistic information delivery. With its emphasis on scenes instead of events, people instead of sources, and sequencing instead of a straightforward delivery of news, narrative journalism redefined the purpose, the practice and the possibilities of journalism in daily news production. Understanding how this kind of journalism created a particular interpretive lens that privileged certain issues and discouraged others lies at the center of my research.

In this dissertation I examine how narrative innovations took hold in American newspapers and how in turn the production logic of newspapers affected narrative conventions. Relying on archival research, oral history interviews and textual analysis, I trace and analyze the emergence of narrative journalism in American newspapers between the 1960s and the 1990s. I argue that a combination of individual efforts and institutional initiatives changed newsroom cultures, fostered an interpretive community and created rituals, establishing an alternative way of reporting and writing the news in American newspapers. As a result, this work offers a nuanced description of how a new set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors emerged in journalism and how this novel news

regime shaped the attitudes and practices of media producers and consumers in the late 20th century.

It is not that media scholars have neglected the transformations in the newspaper industry or overlooked the significance of narrative journalism. My own work builds on extensive scholarship in journalism history, literary journalism studies and the sociology of news production. To date, however, there is no "institutionally situated history of literary journalism."[5] Moreover, most research on narrative journalism focuses on the magazine and book publishing industry and rarely extends beyond the high time of the New Journalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[6] As Forde writes in this context, "no historical study exists from the decline of New Journalism to the present."[7] It is my hope that this dissertation will be a first step to fill some of these research gaps.

Narrative, in its most common sense, is defined as an "account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account."[8] In the context of journalism, "the term 'narrative news story' refers most broadly to any sort of nonfiction storytelling, but more specifically to a news story that begins with an anecdote rather than a summary lead and then is organized in temporal sequence rather than either by inverted pyramid style or analytically."[9]

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[5] John J. Pauly, "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation," *Journalism* 15, no. 5 (2014): 590.
[6] An exception is the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS). Over the past 10 years its members have shed light on new developments in literary journalism. Robert Boynton also made an important contribution in highlighting a generation of "new, new journalists." See Robert S. Boynton, *The New, New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).
[7] Kathy Roberts Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 56.
[8] Oxford English Dictionary, "narrative, n.," OED Online, accessed May, 14, 2013, <http://www.oed.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/view/Entry/125146?rskey=VXrq5g&result=1>.
[9] John J. Nerone, J. "Narrative News Story," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach (Blackwell Reference Online, 2008), accessed 15 May 2013, http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9781405131995_yr2011_chunk_g978140513199519_ss2-1

While some scholars have argued that all news is narrative[10] it is important to note that not all news is equally narrative. As Schudson writes,

> All news stories are stories, but some are more storylike than others. Some of them remind us of the novel, the joke, the campfire story, the gossip, the moral caution, the various fictional or nonfictional but highly structured and purposive forms people typically associate with the word "story." The classic "hard news" story places all the critical information in the first sentence and does not compel most people to read to the end. That end is never a conclusion or a moral, but only the least important information of all the information that would fit in the allotted space. Thus, hard news stories aren't narrative-driven. The classic hard news story operates more to convey useful information efficiently than to build a shared world with readers emotionally. At this end of journalistic writing, the reporter mimics a piece of machinery that conveys relevant information with accuracy. At the other end, the reporter resembles a literary or photographic artist, connecting worlds more than conveying data.[11]

While a distinction between story and information seems useful to analyze different news styles, it also obscures the interconnectedness between the two terms. Information needs to be conveyed in some kind of narrative form to be understood; narrative needs to carry some kind of information to be meaningful. It is one goal of this dissertation to problematize, examine and clarify the distinction between story and information. To paraphrase a quote from James Carey, narrative "incorporates certain modes of explanation and rejects or makes subsidiary others."[12] This study, then, is an effort to show how reporters and editors conceptualized narrative journalism as a mode of explanation and how they justified its use in the daily newspaper production.

This dissertation begins with a review of scholarly literature in the fields of literary journalism, journalism history and the sociology of news production (chapter II). The following chapter (III) explains the foundations of my theoretical approach and how I

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[10] Elizabeth Bird and Robert Dardenne, "Rethinking News and Myth as Story-Telling," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, eds. Karin Wahl-Jorgenson and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2009); Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001).
[11] Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News* (New York: Norton, 2003), 191-192.
[12] As quoted in Schudson, *Sociology of News*, 190.

synthesized two strands of theories into a model that I call "cultural institutionalism." Here I also lay out my methodological approach. Chapters IV to VI constitute the main body of this historical research. My arguments proceed along three thematic and conceptual axes, reflecting three stages in the evolution of narrative journalism in American newspapers: disruption, innovation, and maturation. Each of these three key chapters will synthesize organizational and cultural threads of analysis. In a concluding chapter (VII) I will summarize my findings, contextualize them with regard to scholarly literature and reflect on the role of narrative journalism in the digital world.

The title of this dissertation "Rediscovering Narrative: A Cultural History of Journalistic Storytelling in American Newspapers, 1969-2001" was inspired by Michael Schudson's seminal study *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*.[13] Any periodization is somewhat arbitrary but I pegged my analysis to significant developments in the evolution of narrative journalism in American newspapers. In 1969, *The Washington Post* launched the Style section, creating a platform for narrative news stories that was widely emulated in the newspaper industry. 2001 marked the first conference on narrative journalism at the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University. This event exemplifies the moment when a self-declared, yet unofficial "narrative movement"[14] had solidified.

To suggest that narrative journalism expanded between the 1960s and the early 2000s is not to say that it originated then. However, narrative journalism during that time had its own unique characteristics, which this dissertation will parse out. And even if longform journalism has mostly disappeared from newspapers in the wake of the digital transition, narrative techniques and practices have expanded throughout all news sections. Consequently, narrative techniques have crossed over into the digital realm and, rebranded

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[13] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
[14] Mark Kramer, "Narrative Journalism Comes of Age," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 5.

as storytelling, have come to define many aspects of the media industry. Thus, what started out as a fringe movement, has become a mainstream phenomenon.

This dissertation tells the story of how resources and rhetoric were mobilized to build a narrative movement among newspaper reporters and editors. Resources were established in individual newsrooms, across organizations, within institutional frameworks, as networks and at conferences. The rhetoric of conceptualizing and justifying narrative techniques within the newspapers came from reporters, editors and scholars.
By offering a "thick"[15] description, this dissertation emphasizes the cumulative effects of individual and institutional initiatives rather than one-dimensional or unidirectional explanations.

This dissertation documents and analyzes significant changes in newspaper production and their consequences for news values, professional roles and readership engagement. Examining these dimensions is important because it highlights the significance of journalism as a cultural practice. Changes in journalism reflect changes in the way that public debate is shaped. Journalistic norms and values not only structure the work of reporters, editors and media managers. They also determine what and how readers and viewers learn about the world they live in. Narrative journalism, then, provides a distinct form to explore conditions of everyday life, the political nature of communities, and the norms and structures of power that shape these relationships.

My analysis does not privilege narrative journalism as the only or the best way to do journalism but it challenges assumptions of journalism as a uniform and immutable social practice. American journalism, as a number of critics pointed out, in general has became softer, more commercial, yet also more adversarial in the last quarter of the 20th century,

[15] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

causing harmful effects for political life and public debate. In this context, my goal is to study how and to what extent narrative journalism responded to, mediated and channeled social change. "In the past," wrote Kevin Barnhurst, "each new kind of news may not have made more (or less) sense of the world, but it made *different* sense."[16]

Chapters II, III and IV of this dissertation contain previously published material.

[16] Kevin Barnhurst, *Mr. Pulitzer and the Spider: Modern News from Realism to the Digital* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2016), 42.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sections of this chapter ("History of Journalism") are revised versions from
Thomas R. Schmidt, "Rearticulating Carey: Towards a Cultural History of Journalism," in *Models of Communication: Philosophical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Mats Bergman (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
Thomas R. Schmidt, "The Circuit of Culture: A Model for Journalism History," *CM: Communication and Media* 11, vol. 36 (2016): 71-88.

My research is situated at the intersection of literary journalism, journalism history and the sociology of news production. In this chapter I review research literature in these fields as it pertains to contextualizing the evolution of narrative journalism in American newspapers. First, I discuss scholarship in the still-emerging field of literary journalism studies. The second section focuses on journalism history with a special emphasis on relating my approach to the work of James Carey. The third section reviews recent studies in the field of journalism studies and political communication.

Literary Journalism

The beginnings of contemporary narrative journalism are commonly associated with the 1960s and the New Journalism. However, a substantial body of scholarship has emphasized the importance of its precursors in U.S. literary history. Far from being a creation "ex nihilo," narrative journalism as a cultural phenomenon had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. When scholars of literary journalism describe this era, they emphasize a broad shift in American culture towards a "paradigm of actuality."[17] In an age of accelerating industrialization, massive immigration and the nationalization of American life,

[17] Connery, *Journalism and Realism.*

journalism and literature turned their gaze to actual people and how they lived. It became important to describe the cities (especially New York) with their sights and sounds, social life in all its complexity and diversity. Journalists and fiction writers were intrigued by the variety of immigrant lifestyles and their often abysmal living conditions. They were trying to make sense of the modern world, brought about by scientific innovation and economic expansion.

As scholars focused on early literary journalism, they also constructed narrative journalism as a distinct scholarly object, identifying the intersections between literature and journalism. Studies often focus on individual literary journalists and examine how they combine a distinct writing style with enterprising reporting techniques. Contributions in Connery's *Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, for example, portrayed Hutchins Hapgood, Jacob Riis and others who ventured out as ethnographers and introduced a wider audience to the plight of the slums in New York City.[18]

The early literary journalism emerged in an era when literature and journalism were not yet entirely separated. Hartsock pointed to three characteristics that led to a distinct form of literary journalism: journalists borrowed fictional techniques for writing their stories, literary critics paid attention to this new genre, and the professionalization of journalism carved out a space for writers to make a living.[19] The latter, however, also spurred a development towards more differentiation between literature and journalism. While early literary journalists like Mark Twain and Stephen Crane easily switched between genres, a growing self-awareness of reporters and editors led to efforts for codifying practices.[20] Forde and Foss analyzed journalistic trade publications between 1890 and 1910 and concluded that

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[18] Thomas Bernard Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form," in *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, ed. Thomas Bernard Connery (New York: Greenwood, 1992).
[19] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism.*
[20] Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

journalism and literature were drifting apart during that era.[21] They detect a turn towards looking at journalism as an empirical and scientific practice, a development they attribute to the growing importance of the early social sciences during that time.[22]

Wilson offered the most comprehensive view of the literary journalism scene in the United States at the end of the 19th century.[23] He examined how new literary techniques took root in the literary marketplace and how the marketplace created new structures for nonfiction writing.

> At one level, turn-of-the-century journalism was a major force in defining the visible landscape of this nation, in pushing writers to explore these previously unseen areas and in testing the ability of older American values to explain those areas. Forecasting the new attractions of book and magazine work journalism careers would continue to draw American literary apprentices for the relative surety of salary, the promise of adventure and public renown, and contact with social and political leaders. Writers thus flocked to reporting, compelled by a variety of cultural needs to explore and experiment with the American underside; reporting, in turn, set a tone for other writing.[24]

It is an open question why literary journalism after this time of broad popular and professional support retreated after the First World War. Scholars tended to just skip over the 1920s and 1930s without further explanation. The retreat of literary journalism probably had to do with the maturing of professional journalism as a quest for objectivity during that time. At least that is a perspective that can be indirectly inferred from Schudson's social history of journalism.[25] Literary journalism did not vanish entirely, however. It survived in the pages of the *New Yorker*.[26] Joseph Mitchell continued the tradition of earlier "flaneurs"

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[21] Kathy Roberts Forde and Katharine A. Foss, "'The Facts-the Color!-the Facts': The Idea of a Report in American Print Culture, 1885-1910," *Book History* 15 (2012).
[22] Hannes Haas, *Empirischer Journalismus: Verfahren zur Erkundung gesellschaftlicher Wirklichkeit* (Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 1999).
[23] Christopher C. Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985).
[24] Ibid., 38.
[25] Schudson, *Discovering the News*.
[26] Connery, *Sourcebook*.

and explored the daily lives of ordinary people, most famously at the Fulton fish market and when profiling Mr. Gould. He and others at the magazine also established the practice of taking license with factual representations, a problem that would haunt *New Yorker* writers even decades later. *The New Yorker* also offered a platform for the work of John Hersey. His story about the dropping of the first atomic bomb in Hiroshima filled an entire issue of the magazine. In carefully researched, yet understated, writing, Hersey described the experience from the perspective of six characters on the ground. Another important New Yorker writer in the postwar years was Lillian Ross. In her most well-known pieces, she applied techniques borrowed from fictional writing to profile Ernest Hemingway and provide a look behind the scene of a big movie production.

Despite all these literary precursors, the so-called New Journalism of the 1960s marked the beginning of a new era of narrative journalism in the U.S. By adapting the style and technique of fiction writing to journalistic work in newspapers, magazines and books, the New Journalists expanded the range of journalistic writing that resonated with mainstream audiences and triggered interest from commentators and scholars. Most scholarship in the past decades focused on defining style and technique of the New Journalists as well as the ethical implications of practicing narrative journalism. The starting point for most research on contemporary journalism was Tom Wolfe's manifesto from 1973 defining this "new" genre. A first iteration of his thinking appeared in *Dateline* in 1969.[27] Wolfe praised the power of this form of storytelling and the merits of applying literary techniques to journalistic works. At the same time he stressed the importance of factuality.

> The idea was to give the full objective description, plus something that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters. That was why it was so ironic when both the journalistic and

[27] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Dateline* (1969), 43-47.

> literary old guards began to attack this new journalism as "impressionistic." The most important things one attempted in terms of technique depended upon a depth of information that had never been demanded in newspaper work. Only through the most searching forms of reporting was it possible, in non-fiction, to use whole scenes, extended dialogue, point-of-view, and interior monologue.[28]

Critics of New Journalism disputed that its practitioners were taking factuality seriously and alleged they were guilty of doing "parajournalism."[29] Early scholars of New Journalism by and large did not question that New Journalism (and literary journalism in general)—despite its stylistic innovations such as immersion, voice, accuracy, and symbolism—was committed to factuality and accuracy.[30] Truth was attainable, they argued. As Hollowell put it, "In the best new journalism, vivid and colorful writing complements careful research."[31] At the same time, they also claimed that literary journalism captures what Gay Talese called the "larger truth" because it went beyond the goal of conventional journalism to merely convey information. That illustrates a larger debate about truth claims in journalism. Some scholars took the new journalism as evidence that, following the cultural and societal upheavals of the 1960s, the terrain was shifting. "Almost by definition," Hellman wrote, "new journalism is a revolt by the individual against homogenized forms of experience, against monolithic versions of truth."[32]

Defining and conceptualizing the fluid character of narrative journalism became an important task for scholars interested in the subject. Hollowell identified the writer's subjectivity as the most striking feature of the New Journalism. In his view the New

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[28] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row): 21.
[29] Dwight Macdonald, "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine," in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1980).
[30] Representative is Sims, *The Literary Journalists*.
[31] John Hollowell, *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977): 31.
[32] John Hellmann, *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981): 8.

Journalists established a more personal kind of connection with their readers.[33] Hellmann was most interested in emphasizing the literary merit of the New Journalism. Relying on a definition by the literary theorist Northrop Frye of fiction as "a work of art in prose," Hellman urges scholars to read narrative journalism through the lens of literary criticism. Apparently his goal was to elevate the status of nonfiction writing to the standards of the "New Criticism," an approach within literary theory that prioritizes the inherent meanings of a text by examining it through close reading.[34] Sims chose a more biographical approach and also expanded the range of his analysis beyond the first generation of New Journalists.[35] Hellman and Sims come from different sides when analyzing literary journalism (literary theory and journalism studies respectively) and so it is not surprising that they highlight different attributes. Hellmann's aim was to make literary journalism acceptable for the literary circles in English departments while Sims was eager to legitimate narrative writing with an eye to journalism departments.

When examining the status of literary journalism, no other debate is as heated as the one of determining the border between fact and fiction. Starting in the 1980s, the discussion about truth claims in literary journalism began to diversify. Literary theorists joined journalism scholars in mapping the field. As a result, the analysis of truth claims in literary journalism generally falls into one of two camps. Scholars with a background in professional journalism or journalism education maintain that truth in literary journalism is a matter of accurate reporting. Literary theorists, on the other hand, question the very possibility of a verifiable reality. Aucoin, for example, argues that insisting on verifiability "ignores the mounting evidence from science and philosophy that denies the existence of a verifiable

[33] Hollowell, *Fact & Fiction.*
[34] Hellmann, *Fables of Fact.*
[35] Sims, *Literary Journalists.*

reality that can be described through logical-positivist empiricism and affirms that reality is socially and culturally constructed."[36] A third group of scholars tries to mediate between these two approaches.

While scholars within the first group agree that accuracy is paramount when it comes to assessing the truth claims of literary journalism, they still put forward different ways of measuring it. Heyne emphasizes a difference between factual status and factual adequacy of a story.[37] The factual inadequacy of a work of literary nonfiction does not make it fiction but undermines its credibility, he argues. Eason distinguishes between "realist" and "modernist" writers.[38] The "realists," according to this distinction view, accept a conventional way of addressing truth claims (accuracy is achievable), whereas the "modernists" problematize the very possibility of a straightforward depiction of reality and insert a subjectivist bend. Lounsberry argues that "when the factual accuracy of a work is questioned, or when authorial promises are violated, a work of literary nonfiction is either discredited or transferred out of the category."[39] Her view that truth in literary journalism is accuracy enriched by theme and symbolism is echoed by Connery.[40] In general, scholarship in this group acknowledges a distinction between accuracy and meaning but insists that identifying cultural significance must not conflict with getting the facts right.

In contrast to this view, the second group of scholars stresses the importance of meaning over the fetishization of facts. They criticize what could be called a realistic fallacy, the belief that truth can be unequivocally established from facts. Frus suggests collapsing the distinction between nonfiction and fiction because "the experience of reading an invented

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[36] James L. Aucoin, "Epistemic Responsibility and Narrative Theory: The Literary Journalism of Ryszard Kapuscinski," *Journalism* 2, vol. 5 (2001): 7.
[37] Erich Heyne, "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies 33,* vol. 3 (1987).
[38] David Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press).
[39] Barbara Lounsberry, *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (New York Greenwood Press, 1990), ivx.
[40] Connery, *Sourcebook*.

tale is identical to that of reading a historical one."[41] Truth claims cannot be objectively adjudicated, she argues; instead, it falls on the individual reader to assess the veracity of a story. Aucoin makes a similar argument.[42] Building on narrative theory, he proposes to assess a story's truth claims not by looking at verifiability but by focusing on verisimilitude, probability, and fidelity. He calls for epistemic responsibility on the part of the author and critical thinking on the part of the reader. "The writer, in this view, is situated as an independent moral agent, responsible for what he writes, and readers, as independent moral agents, must independently decide whether to believe him."[43]

A third group aims to reconcile the tension between accuracy and meaning by describing literary journalism as social practice. Pauly looks at the debate from a sociological standpoint. The novelty of literary journalism, he notes, is that it challenges journalism's "empire of facts" as well as literature's "garden of imagination."[44] He credits the New Journalists with having exposed that some of journalism's most cherished ideals (accuracy, objectivity, detachment) were in fact based on conventions that could easily turn into doctrines. "The truth of journalism," Pauly argues, "does not reside in representationalist narratives, as journalists and literary critics both assume. Writers use conventional codes to convey truth, but such codes are themselves just one form of a larger series of social occasions during which interpreter and interpreted meet to argue their positions."[45] Expanding Pauly's approach, Lehmann (1997) argues that truth claims can only be

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41 Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and Timeless* (Cambridge [England], New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160.
42 Aucoin, "Epistemic Responsibility."
43 Ibid., 14.
44 John J. Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
45 Ibid., 123.

ascertained by taking into account the relationship between author, text, and reader.[46] In his view, truth claims cannot be settled by just looking at text; they need to be negotiated in real life. As a result, he suggests to eschew a fixed demarcation between fiction and nonfiction and instead accept a gray area. Lehmann argues that "our minds are capable of comprehending a blurred genre status as the reader negotiates texts."[47]

Exploring and problematizing the boundaries between fact and fiction in the New Journalism (as well as literary journalism in general) certainly contributed to establishing the field of narrative journalism as a scholarly object. Yet, as John Pauly argues, what is still needed is "a more institutionally situated history of literary journalism to place alongside our studies of writerly technique."[48] While scholarship has explored the biographies of New Journalists and described the textual characteristics of narrative nonfiction as a genre[49], little attention has been dedicated to the institutional and organizational conditions of narrative journalism (e.g. newsroom culture, business pressures, changing news values, etc.). Pauly describes the specifics of such a perspective and indirectly also sketches a research agenda for studying narrative writing as part of news production:

> Long-form narrative reporting must find its niche within an existing system of media production and distribution. It addresses its claims for distinction to social peers (or would-be peers) who serve as gatekeepers of literary reputation. Market demands and reader demographics make some styles of work more commercially plausible than others. Organizational routines—how editors solicit, read, and critique submissions—shape a story's final form. And the relations connecting these participants—writers, editors, readers, publishers, critics—are mediated by the larger society's discourse, which assigns value and status to their activities. In a dozen different ways, literary journalism not only reports on society but enacts the social: in

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[46] Daniel W. Lehman, *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction Over the Edge* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 71.
[47] Ibid., 23.
[48] John J. Pauly, "The New Journalism," 590.
[49] The New Journalism was also a popular topic for commercial publishers, e.g. Marc Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion, and the New Journalism Revolution (*New York: Crown Publishers, 2006).

> the imagined reader that it addresses, in the authorial voice the writer chooses, in the venue chosen to distribute the story, and in the meaning imputed to its reports.[50]

After the initial breakthrough of the New Journalists in the 1960s and 1970s, new generations of literary journalists developed the genre by writing for magazines and publishing books. These efforts were catalogued in anthologies and explored in interviews with the authors.[51] Given the big impact of literary journalism on magazines and the book market over the past fifty years, it is curious that only a few scholars engaged with the importance for narrative journalism in the mainstream press. For example, only few studies focus on identifying the logic of narrative and its significance for newspaper writing. Examining writing conventions in coverage of State of the Union addresses, Schudson suggests "that the power of the media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declaration appear.[52] Zelizer demonstrates how certain forms of narrative technique serve mainstream journalism to elevate its position in society and how coverage depends as much on narrative tools as on the actual reporting material.[53] She analyzes coverage of the assassination of President Kennedy and highlighted three narrative strategies used by journalists: synecdoche, omission and attribution.

Against the backdrop of various turns (e.g. narrative, linguistic, cultural) in other disciplines, journalism scholars have examined and problematized the narrative character of news. Overall, however, these efforts treated news journalism as a monolithic category,

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[50] Pauly, "New Journalism," 590.
[51] Boynton, *New New Journalism*; Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, eds., *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (New York: Ballantine, 1995); Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007); Chris Anderson, *Style as Argument: Contemporary American Nonfiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Edd Applegate, ed., *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writers and Editors* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996); Connery, *Sourcebook*.
[52] Schudson, *Sociology of News*, 98.
[53] Barbie Zelizer, "Achieving Journalistic Authority Through Narrative," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7, vol. 4 (1990).

leaving little space for the peculiarities of different genres or the particularities of specific beats.[54] At the same time, journalism as a profession—especially its mainstream version—has stubbornly resisted any efforts to reflect on this tension between reporting the facts and constructing narratives, a tension that is quite familiar to practitioners in other disciplines such as anthropology, history, sociology, etc. Instead, the profession has clung to a rather inflexible notion of objectivity and disinterested detachment. On the other end of the spectrum, literary theory and postmodernist thought have sought to undermine the very notion of an observable reality. Using an arsenal of deconstructivist techniques to expose the arbitrary character of binary oppositions, these skeptics were intent on reigning in journalism's aspiration to dictate not only the public agenda but also to determine what counts as true, acceptable and desirable.

History of Journalism

When it comes to conceptualizing the history of journalism, few authors have influenced the field as much as James Carey. Writing in 1974 in the inaugural issue of *American Journalism*, Carey deplored the one-dimensional character of journalism history. Too much scholarship on the evolution of journalism in the United States, he argued, viewed "journalism history as the slow, steady expansion of freedom and knowledge from the political press to the commercial press, the setbacks into sensationalism and yellow journalism, the forward thrust into muckraking and social responsibility."[55] Borrowing a phrase from Herbert Butterfield, Carey called these approaches a Whig interpretation of

[54] Nete Nørgaard Kristensen and Unni From, "From Ivory Tower to Cross-Media Personas: The Heterogeneous Cultural Critic in the Media," *Journalism Practice* 9, no. 6 (2015); Folker Hanusch, "Broadening The Focus: The Case for Lifestyle Journalism as a Field of Scholarly Inquiry," *Journalism Practice* 6, no. 1 (2012).
[55] James Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 88.

journalism history because it narrowly framed the evolution of journalism as progress towards more freedom, liberty and justice for all. Carey was concerned that these overly idealistic views of journalism not only fell short of describing journalistic forms and practices, but also limited the appeal of these historical investigations. He viewed journalism as "essentially a state of consciousness, a way of apprehending, of experiencing the world."

For Carey, journalism was a cultural process and as such part of "the organization of social experience in human consciousness manifested in symbolic action."[56] In his seminal essay "A Cultural Approach to Communication," Carey differentiated between a "transmission" and a "ritual" view of communication.[57] While the first "is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control," the latter "is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but representation of shared beliefs."[58] According to this cultural view of communication and journalism, the task for journalism historians was to recover "past forms of imagination, of historical consciousness."[59] Carey encouraged journalism historians to get to the bottom of the question why, how and when people accepted the report as "a desirable form of rendering reality."[60] And he conceptualized the report both as a social form and a social practice, linking aesthetic representation with social interaction. Journalism, in this context, is as "a particular social form, a highly particular type of consciousness, a particular organization of social experience."[61]

All these elements—journalism as ritual, journalism as consciousness, journalism as social form—lie at the core of Carey's understanding of a cultural history of journalism.

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[56] Ibid., 91.
[57] James Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication," in *Communication and Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, ed. James Carey (Florence: Routledge, 2009).
[58] Ibid., 12; 15.
[59] Carey "Problem of Journalism History," 90
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 91.

Implicitly, Carey is saying that to understand the form of journalism it is necessary to appreciate the social structures from which it emerges. At the same time, Carey encourages scholars to study the habits and routines of journalism by taking seriously the specific expression that they find in particular formats.

Carey was a cultural historian *avant la lettre*. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that cultural history became a conceptual approach in historiography. By then scholars were exploring issues and areas that were previously overlooked.[62] But journalism historians were struggling to figure out what Carey's call for a cultural history of journalism could look like. What did he really mean by consciousness? How can we transpose the notion of ritual and its context of small, local communities to a larger scale of complex societies? What does it really mean to speak about a particular organization of social experience when that very experience is fragmented and mediated by economic and technological forces? And how could this be channeled into a research strategy of theorizing journalism in time? The very notions that made Carey's conceptualization intriguing—consciousness instead of an exclusive focus on economy and technology; ritual instead of a top-down sender-receiver model; social form instead of commercial product—also triggered critique. Various scholars engaged with the theoretical implications of these terms and problematized their usefulness.

Initial efforts to "operationalize Carey" zeroed in on the report as an expression of "consciousness." Schwartzlose suggested a content analysis spanning over a period of 270-years to analyze content, technique and style of news reports.[63] Erickson proposed to

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[62] Lawrence B. Glickman, "The 'Cultural Turn,'" in *American History Now*, eds. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (American Historical Association: Philadelphia, 2011); Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History*? (Cambridge U.K.; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004); Gordon S. Wood, *The Purpose of the Past: Reflections on the Uses of History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).
[63] Richard Schwartzlose, "First Things First: A Proposal," *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975).

examine in how far news reports reflected flavor, ethos and climate of journalistic values.[64] Marzolf, too, underscored the importance of content analysis but was also advocated for studying journalists as a group.[65] In sum, as Nord noted, there was some "misunderstanding" because the early Carey commentators mistook a paradigmatic for a mere methodological challenge.[66]

While being sympathetic to Carey's goals, Tucher (2009) suggests that "consciousness" might be too confusing a word to explore the history of journalism. Instead, she reframes Carey's call for a cultural history and proposes to "explore the development of the most distinctive and elemental of journalistic tasks: the effort of some humans to persuade other humans they probably do not know that what they say is an acceptable (I do not specify 'accurate') representation of a world every one of them can glimpse."[67]

While Carey was widely hailed as introducing an anthropological perspective to communication research, his "ritual view" was equally criticized for uncritically reifying notions of community and inclusion to the detriment of marginalized groups in society.

> At the center of Carey's plea for resurrecting the ritual model is the promise of a return to conditions in which 'communal life,' 'community,' and 'shared experience' can flourish. Yet Carey's argument relies heavily and uncritically on the rhetorical weight of such concepts, which are conceived of in commonsense terms as intrinsic social goods.[68]

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[64] John E. Erickson, "One Approach to the Cultural History of Reporting', *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975).
[65] Marion Marzolf, "Operationalizing Carey: An Approach to the Cultural History of Journalism," *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (1975).
[66] David Paul Nord, "James Carey and Journalism History," *Journalism History* 32, vol. 3 (2006): 122.
[67] Andie Tucher, "Notes on a Cultural History of Journalism," *Cultural Studies* 23, vol. 2 (2009): 290.
[68] Gretchen Soderlund, "Communication Scholarship as Ritual: An Examination of James Carey's Cultural Model of Communication," in *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on Communications, Transportation, History*, eds. Jeremy Packer & Craig Robertson (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 106.

Additionally, critics and acolytes alike problematized Carey's idealist leanings and demanded a more thorough investigation of power, ideology and social conflict.[69] Carey had preempted this critique by pointing out that he was far from ignoring conflict. He suggested to conceptualize social and cultural struggles within a broader framework and gave as an example the Chicago School of Thought and its view of cultural struggle. It "views struggle not merely in class and economic terms but extended it to a full array of interests: aesthetic, moral, political, and spiritual. Such struggles were, of course, conducted on class lines but also along other fronts: racial, religious, ethnic, status, regional, and, we would have to add today, gender."[70]

The latest effort to re-read Carey's call to action and draw conclusions for the practice of studying journalism history comes from Roessner.[71] While detecting a "naïve optimism" in Carey, Roessner counters the popular perception that Carey did not offer a framework for crafting the cultural history of journalism. She recommends taking a closer look at the cultural historian Raymond Williams in order to tease out Carey's understanding of cultural history.[72] With her co-author Popp she suggests to shift attention from conceptualizing "consciousness" as an entity to thinking about it as "real lived relationships among individuals, institutions, and cultures" and "the circuits of market culture, or dense networks of exchange through which socioeconomic worlds are made and remade."[73] My rearticulation of Carey's thinking as cultural institutionalism (see below) shares this sentiment

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[69] See Barbie Zelizer, "Jim Carey's Book of the Dead," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009); John Durham Peters, "Technology and ideology: the case of the telegraph revisited," in *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on Communications, Transportation, History*, eds. Jeremy Packer & Craig Robertson (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).
[70] James Carey, "The Chicago School and the History of Mass Communication Research," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press), 32.
[71] Amber Roessner, Rick Popp, Brian Creech and Fred Blevens, "'A Measure of Theory?': Considering the Role of Theory in Media History," *American Journalism* 30, no. 2 (2013).
[72] Ibid., 263-267.
[73] Ibid., 266; 270-271.

and actually constitutes an effort to conceptualize these lived relationships among individuals, institutions and cultures in the context of journalism.

Interpretations of Carey's conceptualization have mostly focused on his critique of the Whig-approach to journalism. Less noted, however, was another important critique that Carey articulated. In a follow-up conversation to his journalism history essay, Carey also argued that over the years a particular anti-Whig paradigm had taken shape.

> A new generation of journalism historians does not in general have the same identification with the profession. Having come to maturity within the academy, they pretty much identify with the academic life rather than the professional community. They are therefore prone to commit an opposite error, to articulate a more or less anti-Whig interpretation of the press, an interpretation that can be similarly self-serving because it starts from the premise that the academy is somehow superior to the world of journalism. If in earlier work, we had the academy pretty much looking up to and revering journalism, we now produce an often contemptuous view from the academy toward journalism. Academics can now produce a form of criticism of journalism that they would never apply to their own work within the universities.[74]

This critique is for the most part addressing the first generation of newsroom ethnographers who studied journalistic practices, norms and values by embedding themselves in newsrooms to observe the daily routines of news workers. In the 1970s, these sociologists, who were influenced by social constructionism, studied news routines and their effects of constructing reality for a mass media audience. Many of them argued that news were not factual reports about the world we live in but "a depletable consumer product that must be made fresh daily."[75] They challenged the notion of objectively accessible set of events and instead described news as the product of a highly standardized manufacturing

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[74] James Carey, "'Putting the World at Peril': A Conversation with James Carey," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press), 109.

[75] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 179; see also Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill as local Occurrence and National Event," *American Journal of Sociology* 81, no. 2 (1975); Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

process.[76] When Carey described these analyses as displaying "an often contemptuous view," he in fact criticized that they were dehumanizing a highly humanistic form of organizing reality. Yet, Carey also acknowledged structural pressures weighing on the journalism as culture. He described journalism as an "industrial art" in addition to being a "literary art" and highlighted that "methods, procedures, techniques were developed not only to satisfy the demands of the profession but also to meet the needs of industry and to turn out a mass-produced commodity."[77]

All in all, however, it is probably fair to say that Carey was more interested in analyzing the cohesive forces of community than deconstructing the divisive forces of capitalist society. As this brief review of Carey's approach has demonstrated, this limitation arises from a particular terminology that emphasized terms such as consciousness, ritual and the report. I agree with Grossberg that some of the vocabulary in Carey's version of cultural studies "may no longer have the power to do all that is required of it."[78] This view does not discount Carey's merits; it just calls for a renewed effort to think about the complexities of theorizing journalism as culture.

Sociology of News Production

When American newspapers rediscovered storytelling in the 1960s and 1970s, they broke with conventions, practices and rules of traditional news writing and instead advanced narrative journalism as a tool of journalistic storytelling. This development was part of a broader transformation of American journalism, a turn towards interpretive journalism. Across different kinds of media (broadcast, print) and across media organizations, journalists

[76] For overviews of sociological approaches see Schudson, *Sociology*; Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy,* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004).
[77] Carey, "Journalism History," 91-92.
[78] Lawrence Grossberg, "The Conversation of Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2: 181.

moved away from a straight-forward chronicling of daily news and events and adopted approaches that emphasized analytical, interpretive, subjective, or contextual reporting. A number of scholars have demonstrated this paradigmatic shift in quantitative studies.[79] Drawing on a sample of three newspapers, Fink and Schudson found that "conventional" news stories declined from 80 to 90 percent in the 1950s to about 50 percent in 2003.[80] During the same period, the proportion of "contextual reporting" on front pages grew form under 10 percent to about 40 percent. Fink and Schudson defined contextual reporting in a variety of ways: these stories may be explanatory, provide news analysis or describe social trends. They may be based on numerical data or "engage the imaginations of readers, transporting them to unfamiliar places." Despite their stylistic differences, "all contextual stories share […] an effort at offering analysis or context that goes beyond the 'who-what-when-where of a recent event."[81] They also identified "social empathy stories" which they define as stories that "describe a person or a group of people not often covered in news stories.[82] The number of such stories increased notably between 1967 and 1979.[83] Comparing the coverage of immigration news in three American newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s with that of the 2000s, Benson found that the proportion of page-one articles with narrative leads increased from 22 percent to 33 percent.[84] Weldon examined the front-pages of 20 newspapers and found that between 2001 and 2004 the proportion of feature stories

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[79] Benson, *Shaping Immigration* News; Kevin G. Barnhurst and Diana Mutz, "American Journalism and the Decline in Event-centered Reporting," *Journal of Communication* 47, no. 4 (1997); Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Eugenia Mitchelstein, *News Gap When the Information Preferences of the Media and the Public Diverge* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013); Katharine Fink and Michael Schudson, "The Rise of Contextual Journalism, 1950s–2000s," *Journalism* 15, no. 1 (2014); Weldon, *Everyman News*; Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: A. Knopf, 1993).

[80] Fink and Schudson, "Rise of Contextual Journalism."

[81] Ibid., 9.

[82] "Such stories encourage readers to be interested in, have compassion for, or empathize with, the experiences and problems of people who are largely unfamiliar with them. Social empathy stories often use personal experiences to highlight larger social problems […]." Ibid., 9.

[83] Ibid., 12.

[84] Benson, *Shaping Immigration News*, 88-89.

increased form 35 percent to 50 percent.[85] One of the most ambitious efforts to quantify the change in the content and form of news writing came from Barnhurst and Mutz. Analyzing the content of three newspapers over the period of 100 years, Barnhurst and Mutz detect fundamental shift towards more contextual and interpretive reporting. In particular, they argue that the "emphasis on interpretation and social issues increased substantially between 1954 and 1974" and that "reports became longer."[86] Another substantial study by Stepp, comparing the content of select newspaper from the 1960s to the 1990s, also documented how newspapers became more "featurized" during that period. "The bottom line is," writes Stepp, "that newspapers read different. They are, by almost any measure, far superior to their 1960s counterparts: better written, better looking, better organized, more responsible, less sensational, less sexist and racist, and more informative and public-spirited than they are often given credit for."[87]

Understanding this fundamental change of journalistic practices and organizational norms is not only important for journalism studies in general, it also carries particular significance for the field of political communication. Scholars have associated this interpretive turn in American journalism with a high degree of media negativity or cynicism towards politicians, and a tendency to cover politics as a strategic game.[88] Critics of narrative

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[85] Weldon defined a feature as "a story not tied to a specific event on the previous day. Timeliness is not the main news hook. It can be a profile, trend story, enterprise piece, investigative piece, round-up, analysis, travel piece, review, commentary, anniversary story, or exclusive. It is not deadline-driven. A feature piece has human interest but may not have many of the crucial elements of newsworthiness: timeliness, prominence, proximity, unusualness, diversity, consequence, or impact." Weldon, *Everyman News*, 34.

[86] Barnhurst and Mutz, "American Journalism," 44. See also: "In their effort to provide context and interpretation, journalists identified individuals less often by name and more often by demographic group. Fewer ordinary people played roles as actors and victims, replaced by a case of official sources, outside experts, and commentators. The number of current events went down in these longer stories. References to history and temporal change went up. The index of location also grew, as journalists abandoned the particular street address in favor of broader geographical frames of reference." Ibid., 40.

[87] Carl Sessions Stepp, "Then and Now," in *Breach of Faith: A Crisis of Coverage in the Age of Corporate Newspapering*, eds. Gene Roberts and Thomas Kunkel (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 91.

[88] Stephen J. Farnsworth, and Robert S. Lichter, *The Nightly News Nightmare: Media Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988-2008* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements*

journalism contend that narrative journalism prioritizes human interest at the expense of structural analysis; dramatizes instead of illuminates; offers light entertainment instead of public service; and leads to trivial stories driven by a desire to please commercial interests.[89] In sum, these critics contend that American journalism has become softer, more commercial, and more adversarial causing harmful effects for political life and public debate. In contrast, there have also been efforts to contextualize these transformations and reconceptualize notions of what constitutes politically relevant media.[90] As Williams and Delli Carpini argue, these arguments for rethinking traditional boundaries of the media environment are

> more than mere definitional exercises, they are about political power in a democratic society; who will get to speak with authority, the form political information will take; what will be on the political agenda; the boundaries of political and commercial speech and responsibility; and perhaps most significant, what will constitute citizenship in America.[91]

Yet, while the interpretive turn has been examined in various ways, the particular case of narrative journalism and its role in this development has not been explored in great detail. If we define narrative journalism as a sub-category of interpretive journalism then the study of its evolution and emergence in American newspapers will contribute to our understanding of paradigmatic changes in American journalism over the past decades and add nuance to the political implications of these changes.

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of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001); Patterson, *Out of Order*. For an overview see Jesper Strömbäck and Susana Salgado, "Interpretive Journalism: A Review of Concepts, Operationalizations and Key Findings," *Journalism* 13, no. 2 (2012).

[89] Benson, *Shaping Immigration News*; David Ryfe, *Can Journalism Survive?: An Inside Look at American Newsrooms* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012); Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1995).

[90] See also Andrew Chadwick, *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Bruce Alan Williams and Michael X. Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[91] Williams & Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News*, 13.

As scholars explored changing styles, practices and norms in American journalism, certain blind spots remained that led to three kinds of potential limitations: methodological, epistemological and ideological. 1) Almost all studies that delineate a change in journalistic writing rely on content analysis. While this approach is indispensable for establishing a base line for studying the changes in style, it is ill-equipped to take into account contextual factors of production, consumption and presentation. Content analysis can tell us how one set of texts differs from another. But it is not capable of illuminating what practices, norms and values led to these differences. 2) From an epistemological perspective, researchers have not sufficiently interrogated the knowledge claims of journalists. They more or less accepted dichotomous distinctions like hard news vs. soft news, human interest vs. civic journalism, information vs. entertainment without examining the conditions for these distinctions.[92] As a consequence, scholars arguably failed to notice the incremental shifts in journalistic styles and practices. 3) Ideological limitations are those that arise from normative expectations of what journalism should be. As Strömbäck and Salgado argue, interpretive journalism in and of itself is neither good nor bad. It depends on how it is done.

> If interpretive journalism focuses on journalistic interpretations and analyses of current events, including overt commentary, these interpretations and analyses can be well informed as well as uninformed, critical as well as uncritical, and providing context as well as distractions. This is, however, not a matter of interpretive journalism as a concept. It is an empirical not a conceptual matter. Normative assessments should hence be kept apart from the conceptualization of interpretive journalism.[93]

I would argue that the same is true for the study and conceptualization of narrative journalism. Suspicion and aversion of narrative techniques at times inhibited a more holistic analysis of narrative journalism and its particular characteristics in terms of journalistic

[92] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News*; Benson, *Shaping Immigration News*.
[93] Strömbäck and Salgado, "Interpretive Journalism," 147.

practices, norms and values. In the following chapter, I present an emerging theoretical concept to study the evolution of interpretive journalism from a historical and sociological perspective.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Sections of this chapter ("Cultural Institutionalism") are revised versions from Thomas R. Schmidt, "Rearticulating Carey: Towards a Cultural History of Journalism," in *Models of Communication: Philosophical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Mats Bergman (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

Theoretical Approach

To analyze and explain the evolution of narrative journalism in American newspapers I am drawing from two theoretical traditions within media studies and journalism research: institutionalism and cultural analysis. In this dissertation I propose a synthesized model that combines elements from both strands of theory. The two approaches are not necessarily an easy fit. Cultural inquiry seeks to understand the grammar and context of social interactions while institutionalism is more interested in the manifestation of societal norms, rules and values in specific entities or interactions. They have different notions of what constitutes continuity, disruption and change. And their units of analysis do not always belong to the same conceptual level. They are treated as different approaches to study journalism. Certainly there are tensions between the two that should not be understated. Schudson cautions that the "cultural" view and the "social-organizational" (i.e. institutional) view, are "analytically distinct."[94] He writes, "Where the social-organizational view finds interactional determinants of news in the relations between people, the cultural view finds symbolic determinants of news in relations between 'facts' and symbols."[95]

[94] Michael Schudson, "Four Approaches to the Sociology of News," in *Mass Media and Society*, 4th ed., ed. by James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 181.
[95] Ibid.

However, even if these views are analytically distinct, it is worthwhile exploring how they intersect and overlap in certain regards. Specifically, it is worth examining how social interactions are informed by cultural determinants and, conversely and simultaneously, how cultural artifacts and symbols are organized by collective action. Moreover, combining cultural inquiry with institutional analysis is mutually beneficial because this synthesis has the potential to complement the strengths that each of them brings to the table. Institutionalism can offer a toolkit of conceptual mechanisms that explain stability and change. Cultural analysis provides a sensibility for the "constraining force of broad cultural traditions and symbolic systems."[96] This dissertation will suggest such a synthesis. Blending elements of institutionalism and cultural analysis, I propose to expand the variety of institutionalist models by a synthesized approach called "cultural institutionalism."

The simplistic version of my argument is that institutions and culture work in an intertwined way to structure behavior and attitudes. Moreover, rather than just working from the top down, institutions and culture are shaped by people who enact as well as mediate these higher-order constraints. Like many other scholars I am thinking about structure and agency as a reflexive process. If I am slightly emphasizing agency more in this chapter (and throughout the dissertation) it is just because I am interested in conceptualizing "institutional emergence,"[97] the process through which social action leads to institutional and cultural change. Put simply, people make organizations, organizations make institutions and institutions make culture. And again, this process works both ways so that culture affects institutions as they affect organizations and as these structure the life worlds of individuals.

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[96] Ibid., 59

[97] Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts, *Why Institutions Matter: The New Institutionalism in Political Science* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

My particular field of interest is journalism history and it is in this context that I would like to discuss what a model of cultural institutionalism looks like. In order to increase the significance of journalism history in the larger field of knowledge production, a number of scholars have called for infusing the writing of journalism history with theory. They encourage journalism historians to go beyond descriptions and instead also aim for historical explanations. The objective would be to identify "historical mechanisms" that "rise to the level of abstraction above the empirically based stories that we tell."[98] Roessner and colleagues encourage journalism historians to "overtly grapple with theory," in the introduction to a special issue of *American Journalism* dedicated to the role of theory.[99] "We should do so not to claim better methodological tools to unearth factual accounts of the past (…) but to gain the theoretical framework for more nuanced understandings of our present circumstances and future prospects."[100]

This chapter will proceed as follows. In the first two sections I will discuss the theoretical implications of institutionalism and cultural analysis. After highlighting some of institutionalism's blind spots in the field of journalism studies I will suggest to expand institutionalism's repertoire by infusing components of cultural inquiry. The third section will lay out this model of "cultural institutionalism" in more detail and identify three areas in which a combination of institutionalist concepts and cultural analysis generates interesting interpretive lenses for studying the history of journalism. The last section explains how this approach informed my methodological approach. Here I will also discuss the methodology of this dissertation in more detail.

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[98] Tim Vos, "Historical Mechanisms and Journalistic Change," *American Journalism* 30, no. 1: 38.
[99] Roessner et al., "A Measure of Theory?"
[100] Ibid., 263.

Institutionalism

Institutionalism as a theoretical approach in the social sciences has experienced a renaissance in the last three decades. Shedding the historical baggage from earlier attempts of conceptualizing institutions, the new institutionalism planted particularly strong roots in political science and sociology. There are different iterations and the foci of analysis vary across disciplines but at its most basic level, institutionalists share the assumption that institutions are key components of human life in that they sustain and structure social interactions.

> An institution is a relatively stable collection of rules and practices, embedded in structures of *resources* that make action possible—organizational, financial and staff capabilities, and structures of *meaning* that explain and justify behavior—roles, identities and belongings, common purposes, and causal and normative beliefs.[101]

Within journalism and media studies, conceptual frameworks of institutionalism typically theorize media as a political institution. Most scholars are interested in examining how and to what extent journalism is connected to and constrained by other institutions in society (i.e. government, law, the marketplace, etc.). They are especially keen to observe how these dynamics affect the quality of public deliberation and the role of journalism in democratic societies. Institutionalists like Cook, Sparrow, Kaplan and Ryfe have made important contributions to media and journalism studies in recent years.[102] Their scholarship builds on the notion that news making is a collective process yielding a relatively homogenous product of packaged information. As Cook wrote, "The literature is remarkably consistent in its portrayal of what news is and how it gets produced. Differences

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[101] James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 3. Original emphasis.

[102] Tim Cook, *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920* (Port Chester: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *Uncertain Guardians: The News Media As a Political Institution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Ryfe, *Can Journalism Survive?*

are ones of degree rather than kind."[103] This kind of analysis rejects both voluntaristic models that prioritize agency as well as organizational models that explain journalistic practice by the structural settings of news organizations. Institutionalists argue that what really defines journalism and its routines are institutions not individual initiatives or organizational practices. In their view, the homogenous character of news production—in terms of sources, representation, formats—demonstrates how options for individual initiatives are highly limited and constrained; at the same time, they argue that the homogeneity of the news cannot be explained by organizational practices alone. Journalists, then, are not so much autonomous agents as institutional mediators that enact institutional norms, values and role models. While institutionalists differ whether journalism is more influenced by economic forces (Sparrow) or political forces (Cook, Kaplan, Ryfe), Ryfe identified a number of key elements that theorists agree on.[104] (1) Institutions mediate how macro-level forces constrain and shape micro-level action. (2) The institutional order is characterized by path dependency and a tendency to perpetuate existing patterns of social organization. (3) Timing and sequence of events and processes are crucial in determining outcomes of social action. (4) Institutions go through different phases during their life history. (5) Institutions emerge and dissolve according to the principle of punctuated equilibrium. Absent outside shocks, institutions display a remarkable stability. Yet, at critical junctures and during times of uncertainty, opportunities for changes and new directions arise which eventually lead to a reconfiguration of the institutional regime.

However, despite institutionalism's theoretical insights, some scholars also expressed concerns that the homogeneity hypothesis might have been taken too far. As the late Tim Cook reflected, "Certainly, powerful conditions push toward homogeneity across news

[103] Cook, *Governing With the News, 234*.
[104] David M. Ryfe, "Introduction," *Political Communication* 23, no. 1 (2006).

outlets, and one news outlet is sometimes uncannily similar to the next. But we should not take an institutional focus to suggest identical or complementary coverage across all news media."[105]

Cultural Analysis

Cultural inquiry has taken a wide variety of different forms over the past decades but in journalism and media studies it is impossible to deny the influence of James Carey. Carey turned to cultural studies because of his frustration with behaviorist modes of studying the media.[106] While the media effects tradition may have been his nemesis—he called it "a failure on its own terms, […] antidemocratic and at odds with the professed beliefs of its practitioners,"[107] Carey didn't spare other theoretical approaches from attack. He found political economy and Marxism insufficient as they reduce the richness of symbolic forms to the examination of economic structures.[108] As they claim that social structures lead to particular ideologies, they take a short cut from the source to the effect without acknowledging a sphere where meaning is created, maintained and transformed.[109] Carey assailed functionalism for a similar form of reductionism. "Functional analysis, like causal analysis, goes directly from the source to the effect without ever seriously examining mass communication as a system of interacting symbols and interlocked meanings that somehow

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[105] Tim Cook, "The News Media As Political Institution: Looking Backward and Looking Forward," *Political Communication* 23, no. 2 (2006): 165.
[106] Jefferson Pooley, *James W. Carey and Communication Research: Reputation at the University's Margins* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).
[107] Carey, "A Cultural Approach," 70.
[108] In a different essay, Carey emphasized that economics is not a special case of communication and that communication is not derivative of economics. "Economics is the practice of allocating scarce resources. Communication is the process of producing meaning, a resource that is anything but scarce—indeed, is a suberabundant, free good." James Carey, "Communications and Economics," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader*, eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press), 64.
[109] James Carey, "Mass Communication and Cultural Studies," in *Communication and Culture: Essays On Media and Society,* ed. James Carey, (Florence, Routledge, Florence), 199.

must be linked to the motivations and emotions for which they produce a symbolic outlet."[110] Looking back at his early critiques of functionalist sociology and behaviorist psychology, Carey later explained that he had wanted to shake up the rigid boundaries of media studies as an academic discipline: "it was necessary to write such things at that time to try to clear some space in the academy so other things could be done."[111]

Contemporary efforts to study journalism through the lens of cultural inquiry focus on analyzing journalists as producers of culture. By reporting, writing and circulating articles they do overt symbolic cultural work.[112] "Analysis here considers the meanings, symbols and symbolic systems, rituals, and conventions by which journalists maintain their cultural authority as spokespeople for events in the public domain."[113]

These conceptualizations of cultural inquiry add important dimensions to institutionalism. While I embrace the general thrust of institutionalist insights, my theoretical approach differs in two important aspects:

First, as much as I agree that economic and political factors are indispensable for understanding media routines, they do not do justice to journalism as *cultural* practice. Schudson distinguishes two crucial elements of a "cultural model of media influence": first, media help "to construct a community of sentiment" and second, culture affects the media's capacity "to construct a public conversation."[114] In this latter context "[c]ulture is the language in which action is constituted, rather than the cause that generates action."[115]

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[110] Ibid. 43.
[111] James Carey and Lawrence Grossberg, "From New England to Illinois: The Invention of (American) Cultural Studies. James Carey in conversation with Lawrence Grossberg, part 2," in *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on Communications, Transportation, History*, eds. Jeremy Packer & Craig Robertson (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 199.
[112] Caroline Kitch, "A News of Feeling as Well as Fact: Mourning and Memorial in American Newsmagazines," *Journalism* 1, no. 2 (2000).
[113] Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously,* 176.
[114] Schudson, *Sociology Of News*, 26.
[115] Ibid., 25.

Focusing on journalism as cultural practice also means taking into account the perspective of its practitioners. That said, I am careful not to prioritize the experience of news workers. This approach is inspired by Zelizer, who highlights the inherent tension between self-perceptions and outside perspectives of journalists. "Cultural inquiry," she argues, "forces an examination of the tension between how journalism likes to see itself and how it looks in the eyes of others, while adopting a view of journalistic conventions, routines, and practices as dynamic and contingent on situational and historical circumstance.[116]

Second, in contrast to the new institutionalists who are mainly interested in interactions between the macro- and the meso-level (even though they also pay attention to individual attitudes and roles), I put more emphasis on the interplay between factors on the meso- and micro-levels. My approach is informed by the work of Wilson who studied the rise of Realism in literature and journalism in the late 19th century.[117] His goal was to describe the emergence of a new literary form in journalism in literary, occupational and cultural terms. At the core of his approach lies the notion that journalists are "cultural mediators" whose "social practice is intimately tied to historical needs, options, and opportunities."[118]

> By focusing down on individual writers my larger intention is to provide a more textured and flexible portrait of how mass culture is generated. We cannot fully appreciate the complexity of cultural institutions unless we populate them with human beings, or until we recognize the way in which, even as this market helped to formulate a "mainstream" or dominant style, it did so partly by selecting and amplifying certain *prior* cultural needs and aspirations among writers and audiences.[119]

What does a synthesis of institutionalist and cultural analysis look like? How can these related yet distinct approaches blend together? Borrowing a term from cultural studies, I propose to conceptualize their intersection as articulations. Grossberg describes

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[116] Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously,* 78
[117] Wilson, *Labor Of Words.*
[118] Ibid., xii.
[119] Ibid., xiv.

articulations as a "complex set of historical practices by which we struggle to produce identity or structural unity out of, on top of, complexity, difference, contradiction."[120] Journalism, then, is a process in which journalists articulate and mediate institutional *and* cultural norms, values and routines. News workers actively and subconsciously actualize, enact and transform practices and formats that are bounded by both institutional and cultural constraints. Yet, they also have the capacity to actively and creatively shape these practices and formats. It is important to note that this process of articulating institutional and cultural elements needs to be understood as a reflexive process. Paraphrasing a famous quote by Immanuel Kant, a cultural focus without institutional elements is empty; an institutional focus without cultural elements is blind.

In the next section I will lay out my understanding of cultural institutionalism and its synthesis of institutionalism and cultural analysis. More specifically, I will discuss three different dimensions of this model (journalism as cultural institution, journalism as media regime and journalism as news logic) and how journalism historians have addressed them or could address them.

Cultural Institutionalism

I understand cultural institutionalism as a model in the sense that it serves as "an intellectual construct which simplifies reality in order to emphasize the recurrent, the general and the typical, which it presents in the form of clusters of traits and attributes."[121] As institutional and cultural dynamics intersect in myriad ways, I would suggest to differentiate between three clusters in which news workers articulate and mediate institutional and

[120] Lawrence Grossberg, "History, Politics and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues In Cultural Studies,* eds. Stuart Hall, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 154.
[121] Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 27.

cultural values. Those clusters reflect different dimensions of what cultural institutionalism in the field of journalism may look like: journalism as cultural institution, journalism as media regime and journalism as news logic.

Journalism as a Cultural Institution

At its most general level, journalism is a cultural institution; it provides rules and practices for exchanging, conveying and receiving information, analysis and other cultural formats (entertainment, service, etc.) in a structured way. Although journalism comes in variations—both over time and across different cultures—it speaks to a universal desire for hearing from and connecting with other people by telling stories. Humans are storytelling animals and as storytellers journalists fill an important role in complex societies. Journalists are cultural agents, tapping into a cultural repository of artifacts and practices to shape and sustain public debates in a variety of contexts. They define their self-understanding by relying on a professional ethos that assigns journalists a particular function in society—the fourth estate, the watchdog, etc. They find legitimation and take pride in emphasizing that their work makes public debates more informed, transparent and accountable. Journalists also play an active role in offering reassurance and familiarity, credible answers and explanations for complex issues.[122] News production is more than the basic process of bringing a particular journalistic artifact into being. Rather, it is a cultural process that is informed by the interaction between intra-organizational practices and larger cultural forces—distinct ways of life within which journalistic forms need to resonate. In sum,

[122] Bird and Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle and Story."

journalists take part in constructing, upholding and sometimes subverting the normative and cultural contours of the communities they serve (or claim to serve).

However, as audience research has amply demonstrated, news consumers are more than passive recipients of journalistic formats. They actively interact with the news they receive and shape them according to their own needs. Journalism is not only a reflexive process between symbolic forms and social practices, these social practices themselves are a reflexive interaction between the producers and the consumers of news. Consumption encompasses a wider area of practices than merely focusing on actions such as buying a product or receiving a message. The news consumer is not a passive victim of propaganda but an active agent of appropriating and constructing meaning in the practice of his or her everyday life. "[M]eanings are not simply sent by producers and received by consumers but are always *made in usage.*"[123]

Journalism history can play a significant role in describing and explaining how this reflexive cultural process between producers and consumers (including hybrid forms such as participatory and citizen journalism) played out as well as how this process was embedded in a particular historical context. As Susan Douglas put it, "It is the job of media historians to identify what the common sense was in past media environments, what the dominant sensibilities were, and which co-existing discourses challenged that common sense.[124]

A recent example for this approach is Schudson's *The Rise of the Right to Know*. In tracing and explaining the evolution of transparency as a key concept in American public life, he emphasizes "a change in culture, a shift in what used to be called the 'climate of opinion'

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[123] Paul du Gay, *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage, 1997). 85. Original emphasis.
[124] Susan Douglas, "Does Textual Analysis Tell Us Anything about Past Audiences?" in *Explorations In Communication and History*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 69.

or the 'zeitgeist' or the 'spirit of the times.'"[125] Schudson shows how journalism changed because of social and political transformations but also how journalism contributed to this change by advancing new journalistic formats such as explanatory and interpretive reporting.

Journalism as a Regime

As journalism varies over time, space and between cultures, it becomes necessary to differentiate these variations and analyze their differences. Institutionalism has provided a sophisticated terminology to describe and explain specific historical formations of journalism. Institutions constrain actors by rules, practices and narratives.[126] A particular formation of journalism can be described as a regime. In Williams and Delli Carpini's definition, a media regime is "a historically specific, relatively stable set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors that shape the expectations and practices of media producers and consumers."[127] Or, building on James Carey's terminology, media regimes may be understood as formations that specify ritualized interactions between producers and consumers during a particular historical period. If journalism is a cultural institution, media regimes are historically contingent expressions of journalism in time.

The dynamics of media regimes can be studied with regard to their *inter*-institutional dynamics as well as their *intra*-institutional characteristics. As already indicated, institutionalists have been mostly concerned with studying how journalism related to and was shaped by other societal institutions. Their work examines how the "broader institutional environment of the public sphere provides crucial definitions of, and legitimacy

[125] Michael Schudson, *The Rise of The Right To Know: Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945-1975* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2015), 16.
[126] Lowndes and Roberts, *Why Institutions Matter.*
[127] Williams and Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News, 16.*

for, the news organization's tasks."[128] Introducing the term regime in this context provides an opportunity to conceptualize how dominant political, social and economic forces shape a particular formation of journalism. For example, as Williams and Delli Carpini demonstrate, they broadcast regime in American journalism relied on the dominance of television news and the prevalence of a social responsibility model of news reporting.[129] Resonating with the cultural climate, a particular set of norms, values, and habits of professional journalism had expanded throughout American journalism and established a system based on the detached pursuit of objectivity. Hallin labeled this period, which stretched from the 1950s to the 1980s, the "high modernism of American journalism."[130] He characterized it as "an era when the historically troubled role of the journalist seemed fully rationalized, when it seemed possible for the journalist to be powerful and prosperous and at the same time independent, disinterested, public-spirited, and trusted and beloved by everyone, from the corridors of power around the world to the ordinary citizen and consumer."[131]

While institutional analysis effectively demonstrated how journalism intersects with other institutions and how a certain uniformity of journalistic practices can be explained by extraneous forces, it has not sufficiently conceptualized how journalists, editors and other news workers influence the formation of media regimes from the bottom up. In other words, institutional analysis was more interested in the macro-meso interactions and less on the micro-meso dynamics. In doing so, it has advanced an "anti-Whig" understanding of journalism, an approach that overstated structural constraints and underestimated the agency of news workers. An *intra*-institutional perspective of studying media regimes would take a

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128 Richard L. Kaplan, "The News About New Institutionalism," *Political Communication* 23, no. 1 (2006): 182.
129 Williams and Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News*.
130 Daniel Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: New York: Routledge, 1994).
131 Ibid., 72.

slightly different approach and focus on how institutional dynamics in journalism can be described and explained by examining the activities of news workers, news organizations and their professional networks. This perspective informs the work of scholars who are interested in bringing the actors back in. Lowndes and Roberts describe this approach as "institutional emergence."[132] In this context, scholars examine how groups coalesce to make claims for or against certain practices or actors in order to create or resist new institutional arrangements or transform existing ones."[133] Transposing this view to journalism means not just acknowledging exogenous forces on the formation of journalism as an institution but also the importance of endogenous factors such as the imagination, creativity, entrepreneurship and literary sensibility of journalists. At the same time, those endogenous factors feed from and resonate with a particular cultural climate, providing the language in which action is constituted.

The job of journalism historians with regard to the regime dimension of journalism is to identify how a particular set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors took shape and how it was formed by exogenous and endogenous factors. Thinking about journalism as a regime cuts across different types of media (print, television, radio, online) and investigates their interrelationships in the context of political, social, economic and technological factors. Yet, the regime approach also encompasses efforts to conceptualize how a particular group of news workers has the capacity to mobilize resources and rhetorical means to sustain stability or push for change.

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[132] Lowndes and Roberts, *Why Institutions Matter*.
[133] Marc Schneiberg and Michael Lounsbury, "Social Movements and Institutional Analysis," in *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, eds. Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Kerstin Sahlin and Roy Suddaby (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), 650.

Journalism as News Logic

A third dimension of cultural institutionalism is concerned with the particular characteristics of the form of news. For the most part, institutionalists have treated the form of news as a dependent variable, neglecting its productive dimension of bringing about and changing news practices. Cultural studies scholars, on the other hand, while thoroughly investigating the symbolic representations and cultural manifestations of the news, typically ignore how these cultural forms are embedded in social practices, organizational frameworks and institutional constraints.[134] It is precisely this link between formats and practices that a cultural institutionalism may help to explore. The form of news, as Barnhurst and Nerone argue, "seems natural and pretends to be transparent"[135] when in fact it is always already structured and shaped by a particular historical environment. Thus, journalism as cultural form encapsulates both aesthetic conventions of representation and social practices of news gathering. Too often, these interlinked components of the news production process are treated separately. Moreover, form and style are crucial components for examining how readers and viewers use the news. Broersma argues, "Conventions concerning form and style are (…) essential to make people believe that a newspapers's representation of the social world is valid. They determine which stories are told and how they are told, and by doing so they determine how we experience the world.[136]

The interconnection between formats and practices can be conceptualized as "news logics. News logic can be defined as "a form of communication and as a process" through which news outlets "transmit and communicate information."[137] However, instead of

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134 Verica Rupar, *Journalism and Meaning-Making: Reading The Newspaper* (Creskill: Hampton Press, 2010).
135 Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form Of News: A History* (Guilford Press, New York, 2001).
136 Marcel Broersma, *Form and Style In Journalism: European Newspapers and The Presentation Of News, 1880-2005*, (Leuven; Dudley: Peeters), 20.
137 David L. Altheide, *Media Edge: Media Logic and Social Reality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 9.

accepting that there is a unitary news logic in journalism, we can distinguish various configurations of formats and practices that constitute news logics – "the rules or 'codes' for defining, selecting, organizing, presenting, and recognizing information as one thing rather than another."[138]

The job for journalism historians is to investigate the interdependence between content and form by drawing out how practices shape forms and how forms shape practices. In Carey's words, the report is as much an institutionalized expression of journalism as the institutionalized practice of journalism is defined by the constraints of symbolic forms. As Richardson argues, we need more explorations "about the specific dialectical relations that exist between journalists and their text genres, these texts and their audiences, and between journalism (as trade, profession and constellation of institutions) and the wider social formation)."[139]

This model of cultural institutionalism, as expressed in these three clusters (cultural institution, regime, news logic), is inspired by Carey's call for a cultural history of journalism but also rearticulates it in significant ways. In particular, cultural institutionalism calls attention to three different dimensions in which institutional and cultural influences are actively mediated and articulated. The intangible concept of consciousness can be rearticulated as a reflexive process between institutional and cultural determinants that establish journalism as a cultural institution. The ritual view can be translated into the concept of a media regime. And the social form of the report might be better expressed as news logic. The idea behind these rearticulations is not just about engaging in an intellectual exercise, merely putting old wine in new bottles. I believe that by introducing these

[138] Ibid., 22.
[139] John E. Richardson, *Language and Journalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 152.

dimensions and a model of cultural institutionalism we can expand our conceptual grasp and enlarge our terminology towards seeing the articulations and mediations between institutional and cultural components. Ultimately, this model is not so much a departure from Carey's vision of a cultural history of journalism, but a rearticulation that builds on his visionary thinking.

"The cultural history of journalism," Carey summarizes, "would attempt to capture that *reflexive process* wherein modern *consciousness* has been created in the *symbolic form* known as the report and how in turn modern consciousness finds *institutionalized expression* in journalism."[140] A rearticulated version would look something like this: Cultural institutionalism attempts to capture the reflexive process between institutional and cultural determinants as they constitute journalism as a cultural institution, find expression in specific media regimes and influence the emergence of particular news logics. This reflexive process is mediated and articulated by journalists, editors and many others who work in the news ecosystem.

Methodology

This historical research is an attempt to tell the institutional story of how narrative journalism evolved in American newspapers in the last quarter of the 20th century. At the same time, it also strives to capture the singularity of events, the motivations of practitioners the contextual importance of contingent circumstances.[141] Moreover, the varying availability and heterogeneity of source materials led to an eclectic approach that synthesized various

[140] Carey, "The Problem of Journalism History," 93.
[141] Part of my inspiration derives from Schudson's approach in *The Rise of the Right to Know*: "I try to peg my discussion to specific individuals, institutions, and events. I try to detect the shifting sands of opinion or, more precisely, a set of premises and presuppositions that lie just beneath opinion, in specific, identifiable rhetoric, appearing in specific documents and settings and, for that matter, in accidents and coincidences that contributed—through no one's precise intentions—to the advance of disclosure practices and transparency ideals." Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know*, 16-17.

research strategies depending on the specific analytical goals at hand. Overall, however, my methodological approach can be characterized as immersion and strategic analysis.[142]

I looked for newspapers that best illustrated the evolution of narrative journalism. The rationale for the three newspapers is implicit in the three main chapters as they demonstrate in detail why these newspapers played important roles. However, geographic and cultural diversity were also important considerations. I could have picked the *Baltimore Sun* or the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Detroit Free Press* or one of the newspapers in Minneapolis. The *Wall Street Journal*, too, has an impressive track record of feature writing but because of its nature as a national business newspaper it is not representative for the typical metropolitan newspaper. Moreover, as the east coast and the Midwest are fairly well represented in journalism history and I strove for a mix of case studies that would somewhat represent the diversity of the country. That said, the three selected newspapers are more than case studies since they all of them became prototypes (of different kinds and to varying degrees) that were emulated throughout the industry.

This research is based on the analysis of documents, industry discourse and oral history interviews. None of the main papers in this dissertation has company archives such as *The New York Times* or the *Los Angeles Times*. As a result, finding primary documents required strategic thinking and detective work, mining secondary literature for sources and asking interviewees for cues, leads and ideas. In addition, since I wanted to capture dynamics that affected the newspaper industry as such, I looked for ways to capture the institutional discourse and decided to focus on the American Society of Newspaper Editors with its publications and conference proceedings. Finally, oral history interviews added individual perspectives and thus important texture.

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[142] MaryAnn Yodelis Smith, "The Method of History," in *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, eds. Guido H. Stempel, III and Bruce H. Westley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987).

Since the procedures for selecting, finding and analyzing source material was distinct for each chapter I address them separately. Nevertheless, there are some general characteristics of my approach. Documents were evaluated according to the criteria of authenticity, reliability, representativeness, and validity.[143] When analyzing documents that were circulated within news organizations (i.e. memos, reports) or industry associations (i.e. white papers, proceedings) I paid particular attention to situating these documents in their social settings, examining "how documents [were] manufactured and how they function[ed] rather than simply what they contain[ed]."[144] My rationale for examining the discourse in trade journals is best reflected in this description by Harp who chose a similar approach for one of her studies:

> First, there is an authenticity in the information [in trade journals] that is not spoiled by a personal recollection blurred by time. Second, the method chosen is likely to offer more summaries of the discourse, as this is the nature of written (journalistic) material. Finally, publishers, editors, and reporters throughout the country read articles in trade journals and, arguably, this discourse has an affect [sic] on decisions made broadly within the industry.[145]

My interviews with reporters, editors and publishers served a dual purpose. First, in combination with secondary sources they helped to establish a chronological account of narrative journalism's expansion in American newspapers. As such, their function was descriptive. Second, these interviews also provided source material for further interpretive analysis. Of particular importance was the interviewee's subjectivity. How a source described his or her involvement in narrative journalism not only offered a sequence of events but also revealed how this person related to his or her own history. Yet, far from being narrowly

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143 John Scott, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity Press; Cambridge: B. Blackwell, 1990).
144 Lindsay Prior, *Using Documents in Social Research* (London: Sage, 2003), 4.
145 Dustin Harp, "Newspapers' Transition from Women's to Style Pages," *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 7, no. 2 (2006): 203.

focused on individual experiences, these oral history interviews offered "a cross-section of the subjectivity of a social group or class. They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did."[146] While oral history interviews are by definition "open-ended dialogues that cannot be confined to a prescripted set of questions,"[147] there are established practices and useful templates to structure the interview process. I followed the approach of Morrissey for initiating, framing and conducting my interviews. In particular, questions were designed to elucidate "motivations, inspiration, aspiration, objectives, ideals."[148] Some interview partners also provided personal records and documents that were very valuable for my analysis.[149]

The Washington Post does not have a central repository for company documents but I was able to secure internal memoranda from a variety of sources: Evelyn Small, the designated historian at the Washington Post Company provided crucial documents that she had saved from destruction. Various manuscript collections at the Library of Congress from reporters and editors who worked at the Post offered insights into the newsroom culture. In the 1970s, the newspaper published two books that illustrated internal communications at

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[146] Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop* 12 (1981): 99-100.
[147] Linda Shopes, "Oral History, Human Subjects, and Institutional Review Boards," Oral History Association, accessed February 11, 2015, http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/
[148] Charles T. Morrissey, "Oral History and Archives: Documenting Context," in *Handbook of Oral History*, eds. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham: AltamMira Press, 2008) 191. Here are a few examples of questions I asked reporters and editors:
Could you describe to me how you got into journalism?
Would you evoke for me what it was like to work at [newspaper] during the [1970s/1980s/1990s]?
Going back to the [1970s/1980s/1990s], how did you view the journalistic work that you were doing?
When you think back to that time when you were a (narrative) journalist, what were the biggest challenges for reporting/writing stories?
Going back to the [1970s/1980s/1990s], who were the journalists/writers that you admired?
What did you like about being a journalist during that time? What did you not like?
Who were the people in your newsroom who encouraged/discouraged you to do this kind of work?
Has the meaning of being a journalist varied during the time of your life?Are there any questions I've failed to ask you which you would like to raise?
Are there any topics you would like to return to?
[149] These interviewees were Roy Peter Clark, Mary Hadar, Jack Hart, Mike Fancher and Don Fry.

the company.[150] I also gained important insights about the internal processes at the Post by accessing the David Halberstam papers at Boston University. They contain transcripts of interviews that Halberstam did when researching his book *The Powers That Be*.[151] Since the beginnings of the Style section were farthest in the past and some participants have already passed, it was important to add individual perspectives that were captured in a relatively contemporary way. While all of these sources provided indispensable context for examining the working of the Post in the 1960s and 1970s the most important documents were contained in the Eugene Patterson papers at the Poynter Institute. Three folders were specifically dedicated to documents to the style section. A number of additional folders contained internal memos at the *Washington Post*. At the time of my archival research in the spring of 2015, the collection was not formally processed and did not have a finding aid. Since then the papers have been transferred to Emory University.[152] To get a first-hand account of how reporters and editors experienced the shift towards narrative journalism I conducted oral history interviews (as outlined above) with newsroom veterans. Finding interviewees and establishing contacts was relatively easy. Most journalists were eager to share their memories and talk about their experiences. Many of them also actively helped to identify other reporters or editors who were at the Style section between the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Interviews were done in person while in Washington, D.C. in September

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150 Laura Longley Babb, ed., *Writing in Style: From the Style Section of The Washington Post: A New Perspective on the People and Trends of the Seventies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), Laura Longley Babb, ed., *Of the Press, By the Press, For the Press (and Others, Too); A Critical Study of the Inside Workings of the News Business, From the News Pages, Editorials, Columns, and Internal Staff Memos of* The Washington Post (Washington: Washington Post Writers Group, 1974). Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978).

151 David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

152 Note: Documents from the Eugene C. Patterson papers at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida are identified as ECP.

2015 or on the phone some time thereafter. Documents that would have been useful but were not available during my research, are contained in the Benjamim C. Bradlee papers at the Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin (accessible only since early 2017) as well as the papers of Katharine Graham which are kept at the Library of Congress (embargoed for forty years).

For chapter V, describing developments at the *St. Petersburg Times* and at the American Society of Newspaper Editors, I also relied heavily on materials in the Patterson collection at the Poynter Institute. Of particular interest were materials that provided insight into Patterson's presidency at ASNE and his leadership at the *St. Petersburg Times*. The collection also included a wealth of correspondence between Patterson and other editors of major newspapers in the country, providing a crucial perspective into internal deliberations of industry leaders. Roy Peter Clark gave me access to his personal notes and documents (photos, letters, internal reports, audiovisual material, etc.) To understand how reporters and editors experienced the shift towards narrative journalism on the institutional I analyzed the proceedings of annual ASNE conferences between 1970 and 1990. In addition, I examined every issue of the ASNE *Bulletin* (the official publication of ASNE) between 1977 and 1985 and identified articles that specifically addressed the issue of writing or writing improvements in the industry. Since my focus was on examining the emergence of narrative writing I could not rely on predetermined search terms. Instead, I selected every article that touched on some aspect of writing and then analyzed if and to what extent it contributed to illuminating the evolution of narrative writing in newspapers. Another important source for studying the institutional discourse about writing and narrative journalism was *Editors' Exchange*, a newsletter that was published by ASNE to facilitate conversations and share information between newspaper editors. The anthology *Best Newspaper Writing* offered quasi-

oral history interviews illustrating how award-winning reporters thought about their narrative work while it was in the making. A collection of documents that might have been useful but could not be attained was the APME collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

My analysis of the *Oregonian* is based on documents that I retrieved from select company records that have been archived at the Oregon Historical Society. Of particular importance was the collection of the internal newsletter *Second Takes*. It was published from 1989 until 2001. This newsletter can be viewed as an example for documents that constitute events or phenomena of which they themselves are part.[153] For my brief analysis of journalism textbooks in this chapter, I proceeded in the following way. Since there is no single bibliography for journalism textbooks, I consulted two studies that examined textbooks and their change in content over time.[154] Following the suggestions of Startt and Sloan[155] I used the library catalogue as bibliographical tool and consulted the Library of Congress Classification Outline. Call numbers PN 4775 to PN 4784 encompass books under the category "Journalism. Technique. Practical Journalism." I applied a filter so that only books published between 1970 and 2000 as well as only books published in English showed up. I looked up individual results in the library catalogue to make sure the book contents fit the search criteria. After some more catalogue research under various search terms, I realized that some writing manuals were showing up as P 96 (Category: Communication. Mass Media). A keyword search in this category yielded another set of textbooks, typically with titles such as "Writing for the Mass Media." Another set of books that were included in the list resulted from searches using the terms "narrative" or "feature" in combination with

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153 Prior, *Using Documents*, 4.
154 Joseph Mirando, "Lessons on Ethics in News Reporting Text Books, 1867-1997," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 13, no. 1; Linda Steiner, *Construction Of Gender In Newsreporting Textbooks: 1890-1990* (Columbia: Journalism Monographs 135, 1992).
155 James D. Startt and W. David, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication* (Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1989).

"writing" or similar words. Not included were books in the following areas: Specialized reporting (business, sports, arts, science, local etc.); special reporting technique (investigative reporting); editing (with the exception of books that covered editing *and* writing); biographies and personal memoirs; writing for broadcast; newspaper business, publishing, and design.

I approached the interpretation of my source material as an iterative process. After reading through primary documents and interview transcripts, I noticed patterns emerging which increasingly finessed my interpretive framework. In lieu of a standardized coding scheme, I conducted an "organizational cultural analysis" as conceptualized by Driskill and Brenton. They suggest a specific analytical frame to identify "how organization members create values, norms, and metaphors."[156] As a result, particular clusters of values, norms, and metaphors arose that allowed me to draw conclusions about the emergence and expansion of narrative journalism in American newspapers.

My interpretation was guided by the research question: How did practices and organizational forms of journalistic storytelling evolve in the United States in the last quarter of the 20th century? As this is a qualitative, cultural analysis I did not expect nor try to identify a specific cause and effect model. Rather, it was my goal to provide a "thick description"[157] of the newspaper industry of that era and identify norms, values and assumptions that had to be negotiated by reporters, editors and managers.

Based on the theoretical model of cultural institutionalism that I outlined above, I analyzed the role of journalists as cultural and institutional mediators. As already indicated, this model served as "an intellectual construct which simplifies reality in order to emphasize

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[156] Gerald W. Driskill and Angela Laird Brenton, *Organizational Culture in Action: A Cultural Analysis Workbook* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2005), 19.
[157] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*.

the recurrent, the general and the typical, which it presents in the form of clusters of traits and attributes."[158] However, my interpretation is also sensitive to economic and social structures affecting the range of individual and collective decisions. As Sugrue writes, "The consequences of hundreds of individual acts or of collective activity, however, gradually strengthen, redefine, or weaken economic and social structures. The relationship between structure and agency is dialectical and history is the synthesis."[159]

It is my hope that the following analysis provides a description of such a synthesis in the field of narrative journalism in American newspapers.

[158] Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 27.
[159] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE DISRUPTION:

HOW THE *WASHINGTON POST* SPARKED A CULTURAL REVOLUTION

This chapter is a revised and expanded version from
Thomas R. Schmidt, "Pioneer of Style: How the *Washington Post* Adopted Literary Journalism." *Literary Journalism Studies* 9, vol. 1 (in print).

In the two decades after World War II, content innovations were not high on the agenda of American newspapers. By and large, they were focused on economic growth and business as usual. The newspaper industry benefitted from the overall expansion of the U.S. economy and reaped the benefits of the boom years. In 1945, the average metropolitan daily published twenty-two pages. By 1965, the average number of pages had increased to fifty. Advertising content grew faster than editorial content but the latter grew to almost twenty pages (up from about twelve two decades earlier), an increase of 60 percent.[160] In 1965, an editorial in *Editor & Publisher* declared, "The newspaper industry business in these United States today is growing, healthy and prosperous."[161]

Yet, underneath this optimistic outlook, a number of trends were developing that would challenge the newspaper's hegemonic role and eventually force the industry to fundamentally modernize the ways in which it was presenting the news. As more and more Americans moved to the suburbs, the metropolitan dailies were confronted with changing needs of their readers and their advertisers. The baby boom generation was coming of age in the 1960s and proved to be a challenging audience to attract. The growth of circulation was barely keeping up with the overall growth in population. Television made a big leap in the

[160] David R. Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965: The History of American Journalism* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 113.
[161] As quoted in ibid.

1960s, demonstrating that it was not only distracting the masses but also informing instantaneously when national events (e.g. the assassination of President Kennedy) and international crises (e.g. the war in Vietnam) unfolded. Moreover, American society as such was undergoing fundamental social, cultural, economic and political changes: the Civil Rights movement, youth and counter culture, the women's movement, the epitome of New Deal progressivism and the beginning of a conservative revolution.

Against this backdrop, newspapers around the country were beginning to think about ways to modernize the content and style of their daily product. The *Washington Post* Style section was a pioneer in many ways: it challenged the notion of segregated women's news, a common practice in the 1960s; it created a mix of entertainment and society coverage that was widely emulated throughout the industry; it combined criticism (art, music, television), opinion pieces and service journalism, packaged in a stimulating and enticing layout. However, one of its most significant accomplishments has not received sufficient attention yet: Style deliberately and systematically introduced narrative writing into daily newspaper production. In doing so, it followed and propelled the interpretive turn in American journalism and brought the narrative techniques of the New Journalism to a mainstream audience. As a result, it transformed journalistic practices, changed news values and diversified the newsroom culture so that narrative writing was able to take hold in a new environment, different from the magazine and book world where narrative nonfiction writing had experienced a renaissance beginning with the New Journalism of the 1960s. The Style section established a prototype and paved the way for innovations in other newsrooms.

By exploring the emergence of the Style section, this chapter pursues two objectives: 1) It will provide the first detailed account of Style's beginnings and demonstrate that the experiment only succeeded after overcoming organizational, conceptual and professional

challenges. 2) Offering an extensive analysis of internal documents, oral histories, and secondary sources, this chapter will present evidence and make the argument that the Style section served as a link between New Journalism and a subsequent shift in the newspaper industry towards narrative writing. As a result, I argue that the Style section, by incorporating narrative techniques into the daily news production, shaped organizational practices and a distinctive subculture in the newsroom, demonstrating the possibility and feasibility of what I call a narrative news logic in daily newspaper production. By this I mean an interlinked set of journalistic forms and practices that transformed routinized news conventions and established narrative journalism as a legitimate component of daily newspapers.

More than presenting a singular example, then, this chapter is an effort to historicize the emergence of narrative journalism as a distinct "cultural form of news."[162] Far from being a fully developed model at its inception, the Style section came together in a process of trial and error, reflecting contested notions of journalistic values, professional practices and readership expectations. It is easy to overlook how groundbreaking and revolutionary the Style section was when it began. This study follows the call of John Pauly for an "institutionally situated history of literary journalism."[163] My interpretation undermines arguments disputing the significance of literary techniques advanced by New Journalists like Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Joan Didion for daily newspapers. In this context, Michael Schudson argued that "the highly personalistic, openly subjective elements of 'new journalism' had relatively little direct impact on the style of the daily newspapers."[164] In contrast, this study shows that *The Washington Post*, by developing a model for narrative

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[162] Michael Schudson, "Fourteen or Fifteen Generations: News as a Cultural Form and Journalism as a Historical Formation," *American Journalism* 30, no. 1: 32.
[163] Pauly, "The New Journalism," 590.
[164] Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know*. Schudson does not dismiss the influence of the New Journalism entirely. He is careful to acknowledge that with its "brash outlook and its bold attack on the stodginess of "objectivity" in news [the "new journalism"] was inspiring to many young journalists then and in the decades since." Ibid., 177.

writing, created space for personal, subjective and interpretive writing that incorporated some of the techniques and practices of the New Journalists without giving in to some of their excesses.

This chapter will proceed in the following way: First I will describe the conceptual and strategic origins of the Style section, showing how it collected, catalyzed and percolated ideas that were circulating in the 1960s. Then I zero in on the implementation of the section into the daily newspaper production. Specifically, I will analyze the newsroom culture and identify particular elements that allowed the narrative news logic to take hold in the paper. In addition, I will examine specific gender issues that arose from changing the women's pages into the Style section. Finally, I will discuss the significance of the Style section and its contribution to the expansion of narrative journalism in American newspapers.

Developing Style

Against the backdrop of the cultural revolution unfolding in the 1960s Ben Bradlee, who had become executive editor of *The Washington Post* in 1968, wanted a section that was "modern, vital, swinging."[165] Style replaced and expanded "For and About Women," a traditional women's section, then a common feature of American newspapers. As Bradlee later described the thinking behind launching the new section, "We had become convinced that traditional women's news bored the ass off all of us. One more picture of Mrs. Dean Rusk attending the national day of some embassy (101 of them) and we'd all cut our throats. Same for dieting, parties that had no sociological purpose … or reporting teas, state societies, etc.[166]

[165] As quoted in Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 401.
[166] Ibid, 400-401.

Under the leadership of Marie Sauer the women's pages of the Post had made tentative steps towards reaching a more diverse female audience (instead of solely focusing on the wife/homemaker-role). Although women's sections typically had to fight for attention in the newsroom environment, at the *Post*, "For and About Women" was well established and supported, not least because publisher Katharine Graham was a careful reader.[167] Sauer, a demanding boss deeply respected by the women reporters working for her, ran the women's pages "almost like a separate newspaper."[168] She was driven by feminist beliefs, yet reluctant to align herself fully with the emerging women's liberation movement.

> I always thought women could do anything they wanted to do—from running a home to running a city or a nation. I was always for the ERA, equal pay, child care, etc. … I thought women should have any jobs they wanted. I thought many more women should run for the Presidency, Congress, local offices. But I believed that any woman, if she wanted to, had the right to concentrate on child rearing and community and cultural activities.[169]

While one of the main tasks for reporters in the women's section was covering society events in Washington, Sauer required her staff to think about their reporting from various news angles. As Judith Martin recalls, "Miss Sauer—we never called her anything else—would bark that the society beat was no different from the police beat and send us to White House, State Department and embassy parties to quiz the newsmaker of the day."[170] With this strategy, Sauer validated the women's reporting as serious journalism, undermined the stigma of soft news and created opportunities for women reporters to feel empowered. Despite the progress under Sauer, however, her approach to providing news for women

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[167] "The For and About Women section was a power in the newsroom. … editor was very powerful in her domain. You just knew that about her [Marie Sauer]. The idea of chaining the section must have been an extraordinary thing to do." Leonard Downie Jr., interview with the author, September 28, 2015.
[168] Judith Martin. Meryle Secrest described her as "tough as nails" but said that Sauer helped her a lot.
[169] Quoted in Mei-Ling Yang, "Women's Pages or People's Pages: The Production of News for Women in the 'Washington Post' in the 1950s," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1996).
[170] Judith Martin, "Before You Look Too Far down Your Nose at 'Women's Pages,' Judith Martin Has a Word for You," *The Washington Post Magazine*, December 14, 2014. These observations were confirmed by Meryle Secrest in an interview with the author, September 18, 2015.

seemed to be becoming out of touch with the social and political environment during the late 1960s. This was the time when second wave feminism was gathering momentum and when the women's movement was taking shape.[171] Women were flooding the workplace and for the first time in American history, a majority of women had a job outside their home.[172] For Bradlee, who certainly was not a feminist, yet attuned to the changing gender roles, the women's pages were out of sync with the broader cultural climate. In his autobiography, he wrote:

> Women were treated exclusively as shoppers, partygoers, cooks, hostesses, and mothers, and men were ignored. We began thinking of a section that would deal with how men and women lived—together and apart—what they liked and what they were like, what they did when were not at the office. We wanted profiles, but "new journalism" profiles that went beyond the bare bones of biography. We wanted to look at the culture of America as it was changing in front of our eyes. The sexual revolution, the drug culture, the women's movement. And we wanted to be interesting, exciting, different.[173]

What seemed so well defined from the perspective of looking back, however, was a more complex situation involving different, at times competing goals. Bradlee clearly wanted the women's pages to disappear. In a memo he wrote to Graham and his top editors he suggested that the "Women's section as it is now constituted be abolished."[174] Yet, if the representation of women and their interests was one concern, there was also the big issue of improving the "readability"[175] of the paper. Prior to Style, items like reviews (art, movie, theater), television listings, news stories about the cultural scene and features were scattered

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171 For an excellent overview see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).
172 Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 161.
173 Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 298.
174 As quoted in Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee* (New York: Random House, 2012), 124.
175 "We were concerned […] with the overall readability problem: how do you best organize the newspapers so as to give the reader the maximum ease in finding and reading what he wants to read in the minimal time he has to do it." David Laventhol, "Washington Post Thinks Style is Stylish," American Society of Newspaper Editors. *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* no. 533 (August 1969), 13.

throughout the paper. Thus, there were also pragmatic reasons for combining the women's pages with the arts section while seizing the opportunity to reconceptualize the coverage of stories that did not fit into the national or metro sections. Essentially, Bradlee wanted a back of the book section like it was customary in magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*.

If Bradlee was the visionary of the Style section, David Laventhol was its mastermind. He was one of Bradlee's favorite assistant managing editors and had experience in designing newspapers like daily magazines, first at the *St. Petersburg Times*, later at the *New York Herald Tribune*. In the fall of 1968, he visited the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Detroit Free Press* to gain insights about new lifestyle and women's sections. Comparing the Post's content to the other papers, he noticed that the society coverage in the women's section held up well while coverage of newly developing areas like fashion, consumer issues, entertainment and especially pop culture needed improvement. The biggest takeaway from this reconnaissance trip was that Laventhol saw great potential for a section that was tentatively called Life Styles. "What surprised me," he wrote to Bradlee, "was the limited thinking that is going on in this area." He reported that the *Los Angeles Times* was thinking about innovation, too, but did not develop a concept beyond combining the entertainment with the women's section. Later he recalled, "as part of my development effort, I read the Times, visited the Times Mirror Square, spent considerable time with [editor] Nick Williams and others, and stole a lot of ideas."[176] Not mentioned in his report but widely known during that time was the fact that the L. A. Times had begun experimenting with idea of making a newspaper more like a daily newsmagazine.[177] Supported by publisher Otis Chandler, who

[176] As quoted in Kay Mills, *A Place in the News From the Women's Pages to the Front Page* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1988), 118.
[177] Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the* Los Angeles Times*, Its Publishers, and their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), 326.

had taken over the family business in 1960, and conceptualized by editor Nick Williams, the *Times* promoted interpretation and analysis.

Laventhol praised Dorothy Jurney of the *Detroit Free Press* as "probably the brightest person in the U.S. about conventional womans [sic] editing," but added, "that ends it."[178] The only real innovative new section in American newspapers, in Laventhol's estimate, was a Monday supplement by the *Chicago Tribune* called "Feminique." Laventhol concluded his original report to Bradlee by saying, "I'm still trying to bring thoughts together, but I think that Fashion [a preliminary title for the section] in its original sense---the current styles of life---is what is the key to the whole thing."[179]

Focusing on popular culture and capturing the zeitgeist of the 1960s was a relatively new concept for most newspapers of this era. They were slow in adapting to the changing cultural climate and the growing competition of television. Nevertheless, innovations in newspaper content and design had been going on for years and in a variety of places. Of particular importance was the *New York Herald Tribune*. Before it ceased publication in 1966, it was a laboratory for new approaches to daily journalism. Part of its innovative spirit was to bring techniques from magazine journalism to the newspaper. John Denson had improved the standing of *Newsweek* and closed the gap to its dominating competitor *Time* before taking over as editor of the *Herald Tribune*. He made the paper more accessible and readable by emphasizing that the format ought to accommodate the news, not the other way around. He introduced catchy headlines, typographical innovations, horizontal instead of vertical design, and allowed for plenty of white space to focus the reader's attention. The content got more sparkle and the writing became more interpretive. James Bellows, his successor, toned down

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[178] For background on Jurney see Rodger Streitmatter, "Transforming the Women's Pages," *Journalism History* 24, no. 2 (summer 1998); Kimberly Wilmot Voss, *Redefining Women's News: A Case Study of Three Women's Page Editors and their Framing of the Women's Movement* (PhD diss, University of Maryland, College Park: 2004).
[179] David Laventhol, n.d., Memorandum to Ben Bradlee, ECP.

the sensationalism but followed Denson's approach to make the paper more modern, more sophisticated and more fun than any other American newspaper of that era. Bellows created an atmosphere that gave young, untested reporters like Tom Wolfe and Jimmy Breslin free reign to experiment with storytelling formats.[180]

Under Bellows' reign, the *Herald Tribune* emphasized elements of news reporting that indicated the shift towards a more narrative style of journalistic storytelling: describing people like characters not sources; using sensory detail for descriptions; telling stories instead of writing news reports.[181] One of the young staffers in Bellows' newsroom was David Laventhol. "I don't think they ever said, 'Hey, we're in the television age; we've got to put out a different kind of newspaper,' " Laventhol later told a historian. "But they had things like a news summary on page one. They had a tremendous amount of rewriting—a lot more like a magazine in many ways than a newspaper."[182]

The *Herald Tribune* ceased publication in 1966, but Laventhol carried over some of its philosophy to the *Washington Post*.[183] The first indication how this new approach to reporting requires a particular style of writing can be found in the prospectus, a detailed outline of ideas and suggestions for the new section, that Laventhol sent to Bradlee. Later it would also

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[180] Richard Kluger and Phyllis Kluger, in *The Paper: The Life and Death of the* New York Herald Tribune (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), quoted Ben Bradlee, chief of the Paris and then the Washington bureau of *Newsweek* under Denson, as saying "He [Denson] taught me the sizzle is important, not just the steak," 606.
[181] Kluger summarized a memo that-national news editor Dick Wald had written and was circulating at the *Herald Tribune*: "The reporter's chief obligation, wrote Wald, was to tell the truth, 'and the truth often lies in the way a man said something, the pitch of his voice, the hidden meaning in his words, the speed of the circumstances.'" Stories were not so much about people as subjects but, in Wald's words, "'characters in the cast'" and observed "details that 'make up the recognizable graininess of life to the readers.'" The *Herald Tribune* "was looking for writing with 'a strong mixture of the human element,' articles that were 'readable *stories*, not news reports written to embellish a page of record.'" Ibid., 666, 671–672 (emphasis in the original).
[182] As quoted in Robert F. Keeler. *Newsday: A Candid History of the Respectable Tabloid* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 448.
[183] Ben Bradlee and Katharine Graham had a vision to make the *Post* among the most important newspapers in the country. "The demise of the *Herald Tribune* helped greatly. Until then, the customary iteration of the best papers was the *Times* and the Trib. Now a vacancy existed at the top that the *Post* was preparing to fill," wrote Harry Rosenfeld in *From Kristallnacht to Watergate: Memoirs of a Newspaperman* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 106. Ben Bradlee wrote in his memoir, "Every newspaperman worth his pad and pencil had mourned the passing of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1966. Wherever they worked, journalists envied the *Trib*'s style, its flair, its design, its fine writing, its esprit de corps." *A Good Life*, 302.

circulate among the Style staffers. Laventhol wrote that the new section would contain "[r]eports and evaluations [that] would probe the quality of this life—and the kind of things happening elsewhere that affect it." The next section laid out the particular approach to writing.

> People would be stressed rather than events, private lives rather than public affairs. Profiles and interviews would be used frequently. Direct reports, with lots of quotes and hard, specific detail, would be emphasized. The tone would be realistic, not polyannish [sic]. Clarity would be the guiding principle of the writing style; it would be bright without being flip; sophisticated without being snobbish; informed without being "in."[184]

This description is noticeable because it indicates elements of the New Journalism—the combination of "hard, specific detail" with a "realistic" tone, yet also defines the particular approach of the *Post* and accentuates the contrast to some of its potential competitors and the freewheeling experimentation of some New Journalists like, for instance, Hunter S. Thompson. When Laventhol rejected a pollyannaish tone, he seemed to push back against other approaches to life style sections with lighter fare and fluffier prose. The other juxtapositions are instructive as well. Even if Laventhol does not mention any specific media from which he wants to set the Post's new section apart, his characterizations can be understood in light of the media ecosystem of the late 1960s. It appears that Laventhol wanted to position the new section as different from other models of that era like the *Esquire* (flip), the *New York Times* (snobbish), and *New York magazine* (in). Thus, Laventhol provided a blueprint for a journalistic style that used some of elements and approaches that would later be defined as New Journalism.

[184] David Laventhol, memorandum to Ben Bradlee and Eugene Patterson, October 11, 1968, ECP.

It is important to note that while New Journalism was not established in name until 1969[185], its practices and techniques had emerged throughout the sixties. It introduced novel journalistic habits of interpretation and "organizational practices that connected writers, editors, and publications," as John Pauly argued. "The writers who came to be described as New Journalists styled themselves as interpreters of large social trends […], and magazines like *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *New York* sought the work of those writers in order to create an identity that would appeal to educated, upscale readers."[186] The same holds true for the Style section in general and its writers in particular (see below). However, the specific context of the *Washington Post* as a daily newspaper also created a different and distinct iteration of these techniques. Magazines had to plan months ahead to meet their particular production needs. Journalist and scholar Gary Wills described this process as "lead time."[187] He wrote, "The best editors made a virtue of necessity—they learned to stand off from the flow of discrete item filing daily newspapers, to look for longer trends, subtler evidence. They developed an instinct for the things a daily reporter runs too fast to notice." The *Washington Post*, of course, had to figure out a different approach. The goal was the same, looking for "longer trends, subtler evidence," but simultaneously the Style section needed to be produced on a daily basis. Laventhol thought that with a good concept in hand, organizational practices would develop organically. Progress, however, was very uneven in the early phase as the next section shows.

185 Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Dateline*.
186 Pauly, "The New Journalism," 592.
187 Garry Wills, *Lead Time: A Journalist's Education* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).

Implementing Style

The first Style section appeared on January 6, 1969.[188] Both in terms of graphic layout and editorial content, the section was a significant departure from the past. The first edition of the Style section featured the first woman to be listed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. Two days later, on January 8, the front page of Style led with a story titled "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," a profile of Marvin Mandel, Maryland's then-newly chosen governor, and his family.

> About 6:30 in the morning, Marvin Mandel, who was chosen Governor of Maryland yesterday, rolls out of the double bed and heads for the bathroom at the head of the stairs (a small bathroom, in light blue tile, with three toothbrushes hung from little holes around the edge of a cup sconce, a plastic curtain concealing and also indicating the bath-shower, and a neat medicine cabinet containing a tube of Prell, a can of shaving foam, a slot for used razor blades, and three or four jars and boxes but no medicines, not so much as an aspirin) and shakes off the five hours of sleep which is all he usually gets or needs.[189]

The story goes on to describe a day in the life of Governor Mandel: when he leaves (at 8 in the morning); when he returns home (at 7 or 8 in the evening), what he watches on TV ("any damn thing that's on"); what he reads (everything from Time magazine to the Book-of-the-Month selection); what he drinks ("Bourbon is Mandel's drink, but he rarely takes more than two, even during the conviviality of a legislative session."). As a family portrait the story also quotes the governor's wife ("He couldn't find a thing in the kitchen") and his daughter ("They are very understanding parents […] For instance, they have never set up a curfew.).

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[188] The Style section was part of a general reorganization of the *Post*'s daily presentation. See advertisement, "The Washington Post in 1969," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1969, H54.
[189] Michael Kernan, "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1969, B1.

The detailed description of the governor's bathroom was so shocking to a wider audience that the story was soon referred to as "the medicine cabinet profile."[190] Letters to the Editor clearly show that some readers were not amused by the new style. "Really now," Cheryl A. Skuhr from Arlington wrote. "Surely there must be more interesting things to write about Mandels other than their type of bathroom!" For Catherine Kaufman the article was "cheap and vicious." She called it "a hatchet job 'exposure through intimacy' […] that should be done on someone who deserves it, not on a man just starting out as a very public figure. And Dorothea Beall from Stevenson, Maryland added, "Of all the things that I am interested in knowing about the new Governor of our State of Maryland, what is kept on his bathroom shelves is really at the bottom of the list."[191]

These early reactions indicate that the narrative style was irritating to a significant group of readers. They were puzzled that stylistic elements like detailed descriptions were part of a story in the *newspaper*. In all likelihood, they would not have been so surprised had this been a magazine story or a fictional narrative. Apparently, this detailed description offended their sense of propriety, revealing a certain cultural tension. Their expectations of *what* a newspaper should report and *how* it should report, were clearly upset.

The story was novel both in terms of news content and with regard to the story-form.[192] In contrast to previous profiles in the women's pages, this article was a family portrait, describing not just the first lady (as would have been the customary approach in the women's pages) but the whole family dynamics including the grown up children. Thus, the content was a novelty. However, this story also offers interesting evidence that illuminates how the Style section incorporated narrative, documentary techniques in daily newspaper

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[190] Helene Melzer, "Ben, Where Are You Hiding the Post Women's Section?" *Washingtonian*, April 1969, 53.
[191] Dorothea Beall, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.
[192] This reading is inspired by Christopher Wilson's online project "Reading Reportage" at Boston College. Access was granted to the author.

reporting. Thus, the form was a novelty, too. With regard to the story-form, the profile employs an ironic tone, suggesting to the reader that the depictions of this picture-perfect family should be taken with a grain of salt. Signposts of irony are strewn throughout the text[193], but the writer's tone of bemusement reaches a climax at the very end:

> "Assembling in the living room, the Mandel family posed for a portrait, smiling gently and flashing unanimous gray-green eyes. Behind them stood a pair of marble stands topped with ivy bowls, a glass dish of wrapped hard candy by the sofa and, next to the fireplace, a small table bearing a vase of plastic yellow roses."

This article is an excellent example for showing how the narrative frame affects the representation and interpretation of the subjects. To understand how radically this approach departs from previous conventions in the women's pages, one can look at a story that ran just a few days before the Style section was launched. Under the headline "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece" the article began: "Mrs. Aristotle Onassis and her children sightsaw the Greek isle of Lefkas on News Year's Day, clambering up steep hills and riding donkeys to view the beautiful scenery."[194] No wonder, many readers were puzzled when they were reading about the Mandels. Instead of a deferential treatment, the story portrayed the mundane details of the governor's life and did not hold back on irony (some readers took it as cynicism). In contrast to depicting the bucolic life of the rich and the famous, this story was rich (some of it almost to a fault) in what Tom Wolfe called "status details."[195] The story shows the private side of a public figure but by using a narrative frame of irony, the author also cautions the readers not to trust everything in this staged setting and encourages them to look behind the façade of the polished politician. A few years later, the Mandels would again take up quite some space in the Style section and by then, the image of

[193] "One hallmark of a cohesive family is the dog, preferably one of long tenure. For the Mandels it was Sandy, a collie who was with them 13 years until his death a year ago." Kernan, "Life Styles," B2.
[194] "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1969, B1.
[195] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 32-36.

the wholesome family had fallen apart. The governor left his wife for another woman and she had refused to leave the governor's mansion for five months.[196]

Emphasizing the function of the narrative frame is important in this context because this story-form breaks away from a traditional news form that adheres to presenting the news in a supposedly neutral way.[197] The two frames differ in what they focus on. The narrative frame responds to the question "How do we live?" The news frame, in contrast, answers the question "What happened?" While the news frame prioritizes a particular event, the narrative frame zeroes in on the context.[198] The personal point of view (as told through a third person narrator) of the narrative frame reveals a private life not so different than that of ordinary citizens. In the case of the Mandels, this rhetorical move decreases distance and difference, humanizes the subjects, but also mildly ridicules their personal tastes. This difference in style also reflects an evolution of different news values. The private becomes political and is subsequently scrutinized for consistency with or deviation to the public image. Even though the profile is more descriptive than narrative, it employs typical traits of narrative storytelling, especially the use of status details to craft a character.[199] Seeing and describing the world through the lens of narrative technique is very different than applying

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196 See, for example, Judy Bachrach, "Barbara Mandel: Time to Move On," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1973, B1.

197 My argument builds on Barnhurst and Nerone who argue that the form of news has an impact on the content of news. "Form structures and expresses that environment, a space that comfortably pretends to represent something larger: the world-at-large, its economics, politics, sociality, and emotion." Barnhurst and Nerone, *The Form of News*, 6.

198 For a discussion of the narrative form see Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle, and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News," in *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press*, ed. James W. Carey, Volume 15 in the Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988).

199 In literary terms, one could describe this technique as "tableau," a "description of some group of people in more or less static postures." It is worth noting that in 19th-century drama, this device was used in melodrama and farce, interesting connotations in this context of a political profile. Chris Baldick, "tableau," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1124.

the "5 W's" approach of traditional news reporting.[200] As mentioned before, the Style section obviously did not invent the narrative form of news reporting but it systematically incorporated it into the daily newspaper production. As such, it expanded the space in which the newspaper offered stories about people and how they lived.

Some aspects of this focus on people and how they lived were already an essential component of the women's pages and it is also important to acknowledge this continuity. In fact, it seems to me, Style and its narrative approach validated and elevated earlier forms of "soft journalism." Capturing motivations and moods of people in the news was a crucial element of the women's pages. Judith Martin writes, "As we used to say, "We don't just cover a story; we surround it." Our assignment was to produce sidebars that supplied the details and the participants' motivations and moods—the color—that gave meaning to the dry news accounts that were then standard in the A section."[201]

Laventhol had identified a specific mission for Style, reports and evaluations probing the quality of life. However, living up to this mission on a daily basis proved to be a continuing struggle. About two months after the new section was launched, Laventhol wrote in a memo, "STYLE is. But what it will be continues to be a necessary debate."[202] He acknowledged that society news and the political party circle was being covered well while the section had not sufficiently explored the lifestyles of "lost communities: kids, blacks" as well as "the middle-class suburbanite with a kid who takes pot." In a four-month review, the lack of direction and focus continued to be an issue. Laventhol identified the prime reason for this to be a "philosophical" one: "[W]hat ought Style to be?"[203] The core of the problem

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[200] Jack Hart, *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The 5 W's are who, what, when, why, where. Typically, "how" is added as a sixth element.
[201] Martin, "Before You Look," 30.
[202] Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, February 26, 1969, ECP.
[203] Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.

was a conflict between women's news and life style coverage. Neither area was done satisfactorily, he argued.

One of the most pressing issues for the Style section was the need to address a younger audience with different demands and tastes. Bradlee understood that the *Post*, in order to reach this new generation growing up in the tumultuous 1960s, had to offer a "more irreverent, spicier" form of journalism.[204] The new and growing target audience had a name—the baby boomers. Born after World War II they now were the fastest growing segment of the population in the nation. In the Washington, D.C. area alone they amounted to almost eight hundred thousand.[205] They were well-educated and not all that interested in the traditional lifestyle of their parents. While many of them were highly invested in the political debates of the day (Vietnam war, student protests), there were also part of a larger trend towards consumerism.[206] As their interests revolved around clothes, records, books, and leisure, media outlets were scrambling to meet their needs. The baby boomers were coming of age reading edgy magazines like *Esquire*, *New York*, *Rolling Stone* or the alternative (and dissident) press.[207] Also, from an advertising standpoint, they were a highly desirable audience.[208] The self-image of this new demographic and its expectations for coverage in *The Washington Post* can be gleaned from an early letter to the editor praising Nicholas von

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[204] John Anderson, interview with David Halberstam, Halberstam Collection, box 192, folder 5, 7.
[205] Howard Bray*, The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), 105.
[206] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003). Abrahamson described how cultural changes like consumerism and leisure propelled the growth of special-interest magazines in the 1960s. "For the millions of readers of successful special-interest magazines in the 1960s, the quest of the age may not have been for social justice or political reform, but rather for new expressions of individuality and new outlets for personal self-fulfillment. Empowered with affluence and education, happy to be enlisted in an ascending social class, free of the conformist strictures of the 1950s, but cut off from traditional communal sources of identity and social class, many turned to active leisure pursuits to add coherence and meaning to their lives." David Abrahamson, *Magazine-made America: The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1996), 71.
[207] Lauren Kessler, *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984).
[208] Bray*, Pillars of the Post, 105*.

Hoffman—the first star writer of the Style section:

> We are not young radicals. We are the forgotten middle class lot C. Wright Mills has dubbed the voiceless and unrepresented. We are not snobs, nor are we the Silent Majority. We try to keep informed. We write our Congressmen. […] We read the editorial page first. We have participated in demonstrations and worked for our candidates. We are for the equality of women and minorities, against the war, support liberalized abortion, lowering the voting age, equality for all in basic human needs such as medical devices, food, jobs and a breatheable [sic] environment. The list is endless, as are the problems we face and attempt to solve. At last we have a voice through Mr. von Hoffman.[209]

Given these competing interests of pleasing a yet-to-be-defined audience, the early period of the Style section was characterized by a lot of experimentation with story formats, layout and content. The evolution of the new section was followed with great interest, especially from publisher Katherine Graham. Despite a certain involvement in the development of the new section (Graham sat in on brainstorming sessions), she was not all too pleased once it had rolled out. As she wrote in her autobiography, "I became more and more distressed over the direction the new section was taking, but I was unsure how to criticize constructively something I wanted to improve."[210] Some of the stories she found "tasteless," "snide," or "grisly."[211] Then the pendulum would swing in the other direction and she would complain in a memo: "Clothes, fashion, interiors and the frothy side … are all taking a hosing … I am quite fed up with the really heedless eggheadedness of Style."[212] Graham was actively lobbying for a female editor of the entire section (not just the women's news) "because as long as you have culture-happy editors who dislike and don't want women's news in, you are going to have this situation continue." And she added, "I can't see

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[209] Virginia T. Griffin, who had just moved from Massachusetts to Washington wrote this "love letter" to Nicholas von Hoffman: Virginia T. Griffin, "Letter to the Editors," *The Washington Post*, August 26, 1970.
[210] Katharine Graham, *Personal History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 414. She went on to explain: "I tended to apply a dentist drill too frequently instead of considering things cooly and not constantly complaining" (ibid.).
[211] As quoted in Roberts, *The Washington Post*, 404.
[212] Ibid, 401.

why we have to build ourselves a structure in which we have to fight and plead and beg to get into the paper (and I have never said this before in 5 ½ years) what I quite frankly want to have there."[213] Graham complained to Bradlee so persistently that one time he yelled at her: "Get your finger out of my eye!" As they both recounted later, this was the only heated fight they ever had.[214] As a consequence, Bradlee got Graham's assurance that she would not interfere with the new section for the foreseeable future.

While some readers disliked the new direction of Style, the section also created excitement by offering a fresh take on life in Washington and cultural issues in general. Early letters to the editor illustrate how polarizing the new section turned out to be. Edith Fierst from Chevy Chase was certainly not happy with the Style section. She wrote,

> For many years it has been my ungrudging custom to surrender the first section of *The Washington Post* to my husband when he arrives for breakfast about 5 minutes after I do, and to read the Women's section instead. Now this tranquil arrangement is threatened, as morning after morning I find nothing to read in the Women's section.[215]

She went on to complain that many articles embrace viewpoints of the New Left, noting that "most Americans do not subscribe to it." In her view, the "steady diet of articles blaming the "establishment" for everything, often in a smart-alecky way, [is] neither enlightening nor interesting." In contrast, in a letter published in response to Ms. Fierst's, Margaret E. Borgers praised the new section as a "daily treasure" and added, "I, for one, am greatly flattered by *The Post's* innovation, with its implicit statement that women might be interested in something besides debuts, weddings and diplomatic receptions."[216] It became obvious that the one-size-fits-all approach of the women's pages had lost its appeal while it

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[213] Katharine Graham, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.
[214] Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 300; Graham, *Personal History*, 414.
[215] Edith Fierst, "Woman's Point of View," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 25, 1969, A26.
[216] Margaret Borgers, "Flattered by Style," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 30, 1969, A26.

was not clear yet what the alternative would be. In this context, these letters to the editor reveal more than individual attitudes to the Style section. They illustrate a larger trend in the transformation of the readership, highlighting competing attitudes, not least towards women's role in society.

While this emerging redefinition of women's news was playing out in full sight of the readership, the internal reconfiguration of the Style staff was unfolding out of the public view and it was no less dramatic. These internal dynamics reflected socio-demographic changes, the shifting cultural climate and the challenges that come with all of that. The inherent tensions—men vs. women, old guard vs. young writers, whites vs. people of color—affected the daily production of news and reflected fundamental changes in the fabric of American society. The staff of the early Style section was a "raucous collection of young weirdoes and rebels,"[217] seasoned writers who had distinguished themselves in other sections and the veteran writers and editors from the women's pages. Nicholas von Hoffmann had made a name for himself as voice of the youth and counter culture within the *Post*.[218] He had also pioneered the use of narrative techniques in daily newswriting at the paper.[219] One episode from 1968 illustrates how controversial this kind of approach was. Covering the funeral of Martin Luther King in Atlanta, von Hoffman opened his story writing, "The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led his last march here today. He was in a cherrywood coffin, carried in an old farm wagon to which were hitched two downhome

[217] Anonymous source (former Style section editor), interview with the author.
[218] "Sustained impact came for the typewriter of Nicholas von Hoffman, among those Bradlee hired in spring 1966. Over the next decade his vivid prose, often intentionally provocative, produced more angry letters to the editor than the work of any other single reporter in the paper's history. In the late 1960s and early 1970s he became the favorite oft the New Left and of some of the youth cults. At THE POST some adored him; others wondered him a menace to journalism. His contribution, after he began to fade after the end of the Nixon era, was substantial: by the very power of his words, the details of his reporting, and the outrage of his expressed beliefs he forced uncounted POST readers to examine a life style that repelled them, especially when it became that of their middle-class offspring." Roberts, *Washington Post*, 381
[219] "He was really the first narrative journalist on our staff." Leonard Downie Jr., interview with the author.

mules."[220] The story was published on the front page, against the expressed wishes of deputy managing editor Ben Gilbert who said, "It was not a lead-the-paper story. It was a feature."[221] One of the first reporters specifically hired for the section was Myra McPherson. Her professional biography reflected the constraints that women reporters were faced with during the postwar years. After having worked on the student newspaper at Michigan State, she went looking for a reporting job on the city desk but only got offers for writing for the women's pages. At the *Detroit Times*, she covered a wide range of topics including sports. Reporting on the Indy 500 in 1960, she was neither allowed in the press box nor the gasoline alley. Bradlee offered her a position in the women's section, assuring her that after three months the section would change into the Style section. When McPherson said that she could not work full time because of her two young children, Bradlee responded, "For Christ's sake, the last things those kids need is you around the house full time."[222] Michael Kernan was an example of Bradlee's strategy to put some of the Post's best writers into the Style section. After 13 years of being editor of the *Redwood City Tribune* in California and a year in London, Kernan had landed at the Washington Post in 1967. He started out as a city editor but because of his elegant writing he was assigned to the Style section.[223] The Style section also offered opportunities for young women reporters. The most prominent one in the early years was Sally Quinn, also one of the first hires for the new section. She was hired without previous journalistic experience but quickly rose from a neophyte party reporter to a

[220] Nicholas von Hoffman, "Mule Wagon Leads March," *The Washington Post*, April 10, 1968.
[221] As quoted in Carol Felsenthal, *Power, Privilege, and the Post: The Katharine Graham Story* (New York: Putnam's, 1993), 262.
[222] Myra McPherson, interview with the author, September 8, 2015.
[223] In his autobiography, Bradlee called Kernan "a poet and a newspaperman." Bradee, *A Good Life*, 300. See also, Thomas R. Schmidt, "Michael Kernan: Poet and Newspaperman" (presentation, IALJS 10 [International Association for Literary Journalism Studies], University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, May 7-9, 2015).

star writer specializing in chatty, yet illuminating personality profiles.[224] Later she would become Ben Bradlee's wife and a fixture in society news.

The Style section's diverse composition caused a variety of complications, some of which had to do with the former staff from the women's section. Most of the assignment editors were from the women's section while the reporters were not. This created frictions in all areas of the daily production, from the selection of topics to the planning and writing of stories. These problems deepened after Laventhol left to become editor of *Newsday*, especially during the time when the leadership was divided between Elsie Carper and Thomas Kendrick. These conflicts reflected the intertwined dynamics of office rivalries, gender issues and generational tensions. An instructive document, capturing these dynamics, comes from a young reporter who summed up her impressions as she was leaving the paper. Comparing Kendrick and Carper she wrote, "I think the section needs a man with children and a well-adjusted family life instead of sexually fucked up or barren women." About Kendrick she added,

> I am particularly heartened by his sensitivity to the women's lib thing. He is the only really major editor in this place not to scoff and make jokes about it. And he is quite serious in listening and trying to learn what we're talking about when we say no more pseudo-achiever stories, etc. […] and demeaning adjectives, etc. More than any man at the Post, I think he is capable of handling women as people—which is what the whole idea of Style was supposed to be about, stopping the old way of reporting nonofficial, often distaff [sic] Washington.

Evidently, these impressions only reflect the point of view of one reporter. Nevertheless, they illustrate how the Style section was a place that simultaneously encouraged women reporters to speak out while also creating an environment that pitted veteran women editors against young women reporters. In addition, these internal conflicts were embedded in a newsroom environment of considerable sexism. "There [at the Post]

[224] Sally Quinn, *We Are Going to Make You a Star* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

were no women assistant managing editors, news desk editors, editors in financial, sports, or the TV magazine, or in the Sunday "Outlook" section, no women in foreign bureaus, and no women sports reporters."[225] Women at the Post were arguing that this lack of opportunity for women in the newsroom also affected the coverage in the paper.[226] In a memo to the Post's management, the women at the newspaper expressed their discontent:

> "Many stories considered expendable deal with social issues of interest to the general reader but are given short-shrift in this male-oriented, politically attuned newspaper. The issues of women's rights, health, consumer news, day-care, abortion, and welfare are examples of stories not being adequately covered and displayed. The Washington Post would be a better newspaper if it used the talents and perspective of more women in assigning and evaluating stories on such issues."[227]

Words were followed by actions when women at the *Post* filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1974, it concluded that the *Post* concentrated women reporters in certain sections (Style, Metro), had no women editors or assistant editors and paid men more than women doing comparable work.[228]

Newsroom Culture

The Style section was embedded in a particular newsroom culture that Bradlee created. Even before he was the famed and glamorous editor depicted in the movie "All the

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[225] Mills, *A Place in the News*, 169.

[226] On the occasion of Bradlee's 49th birthday in 1970, they poured their criticism into a scathing satire. "Ben Bradlee, slim, attractive but complex executive editor of the Washington Post is 49 years old today but he doesn't look it. How does he manage to combine a successful career with the happy home life he has created in his gracious Georgetown home?" In an interview today, pert, vivacious Mr. Bradlee revealed his secret. He relaxes after a day of whirlwind activity of the newspaper world by whooping up a batch of his favorite pecan-sauerbraten cookies for his thriving family. […] What does Mrs. Bradlee think of her debonair husband's flair for journalism? "I think it's great," she said. "Every wife should let her husband work. It makes him so well-rounded. Now he has something to talk about at the dinner table. […] Mr. Bradlee loves his work, but he is aware of the dangers involved. So far he does not feel he is in competition with his wife. "When the day comes," he said with a shudder, "I'll know it's time to quit." Mr. Bradlee's quick and easy recipe for pecan-sauerbraten cookies appears in tomorrow's bulletin. "The New York Times Women's Caucus Papers, 1969-1986," 80-M169, folder 3, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[227] Mills, *A Place in the News*, 169-170.

[228] Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 179.

President's Men,"[229] Bradlee governed the newsroom with charisma, magnetism and a visceral presence that would instill awe and send chills down the spines of his reporters.[230] With an "absolute sense of stage presence" he would walk the newsroom, prowling for the newest gossip, as his reporters and editors remember. [231] The biggest validation was a slap on the back, a quick comment like "a helluva story," the undivided attention of the boss who was said to have the attention span of a gnat.[232] Bradlee was equally powerful when communicating his disapproval. He would admonish reporters with characteristic candor, asking "What the fuck are you doing?"[233] The biggest punishment, however, was when reporters realized that Bradlee was ignoring them. Fully aware that they were craving his attention, Bradlee would turn his back or avoid eye contact. "He could be really cruel and obtuse," remembers Henry Allen. "He was like a cat playing with a mouse sometimes."[234] Bradlee ran the newsroom on a star system.[235] Backed by the full support of Kay Graham, he pushed his staff to compete with each other, pitting editors against editors and reporters against reporters.[236] He called it "creative tension."[237] It was a "piranha atmosphere," the longtime editorial writer John Anderson said in an interview with David Halberstam. "It can

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229 Based on the book by the same title, written by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1975).

230 Martha Sherrill, "Ben Bradlee: His sense of Style brought a new sensibility to features," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2014; David Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," *The New Yorker*, September 18, 1995, 78: "He is also the only editor who, even in his sixties, made women blush and men straighten their posture."

231 Eugene Patterson, interview with David Halberstam, n.d., Halberstam Collection, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, box 194, folder 3, 1. These characterizations were confirmed in several interviews with the author.

232 Shelby Coffey, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

233 McPherson, interview with the author.

234 Henry Allen, interview with the author, September 12, 2015.

235 Eugene Patterson, interview with Halberstam.

236 Bradlee was also very aggressive with hiring and firing. "With Graham's support, Bradlee was soon firing the lazy and the mediocre, the racist and the dull, and he then set about raiding topflight papers around the country for their best talent. The talent level in the newsroom began to shift, and so did the culture of the place." David Remnick, "Citizen Kay," The New Yorker, January 20, 1997, 68.

237 See, for example, Rosenfeld, *From Kristallnacht to Watergate*, 113; Fallows, "Big Ben," 144.

be uncomfortable as hell, but it may also be very good for people. And Bradlee is very good at making them feel that they're right on the edge."[238]

The guiding principle for Bradlee was impact. As he described his vision in the late 1970s to Chalmers Roberts, a *Post* reporter and designated historian of the paper: "I want to have some impact in this town and this country." […] "I want to know they are reading us. Impact."[239] The most prominent examples of creating impact were publishing the Pentagon Papers in 1971 and then, of course, Watergate and the reporting that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. But Bradlee's craving for impact was not just motivated by a particular political stance or an overarching moral vision.[240] He just immensely enjoyed good stories about power, people and gossip.[241] Typically, the stories that he appreciated the most were tales about winners and losers, one person's rise and another one's fall, human drama expressed in terms of individual bravery or tragedy.[242] In other words, Bradlee was a big fan of narrative storytelling. With this proclivity Bradlee set the tone for the Style section (as with the rest of the paper) even if he did not get involved that much in the day-by-day operations. As Larry Stern, one of Bradlee's best friends, noted in the late 1970s, Bradlee "is a good newspaperman but not a sustained one. He doesn't follow through."[243] Bradlee had a vision for Style but it was intuitive and not informed by a conceptual framework or specific guidelines. He encouraged and advocated a sensibility for more personal, magazine-like

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238 John Anderson, interview with Halberstam.
239 Roberts, *Washington Post*, 379. Jeff Himmelman quoted Haynes Johnson as having said in October 2007, "[Bradlee] was determined to make the paper into what it could be: A great paper. Exciting. You had to read it. It was just, impact. He wanted impact. You ought to have impact, goddamnit. Instead of this namby-pamby stuff. And impact isn't cheap. It ought to have power, authority, and be well written; it ought to say something, and tell you about something you wanted to know; and it ought to be displayed so you don't miss it. That's what it's all about." Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee* (New York: Random House, 2012), 106.
240 Eugene Patterson, interview with Halberstam.
241 John Anderson, interview with Halberstam, n.d., folder 5, 15.
242 Ben Bagdikian, interview with David Halberstam, n.d., Halberstam Collection, box 192, folder 6, 14.
243 Larry Stern, interview with David Halberstam, n.d., Halberstam Collection, box 194, folder 9, n.p.

stories and enjoyed good writing.[244] What that looked like in a particular context was for the editors to decide and achieve. A story succeeded when Bradlee felt that it reached a wider audience and got people talking.

Writing in Style

As the quality of news writing was of special concern to Bradlee and his top editors, the style of writing was vividly debated in internal communications. One particularly illuminating document is a memo that Eugene Patterson, then managing editor, sent to Bradlee in June of 1971. Not only does it highlight the significance of writing at the *Post*, it also demonstrates how debates about the New Journalism (which had been going on for several years at that point) found their way into the newsroom. Patterson was responding to an internal discussion about creating a statement of principles or set of standards for reporting and writing. Citing a piece from Tom Wicker in the *Columbia Journalism Review* he argued against a singular institutional or professional formula. Instead he emphasized the importance of creating and nurturing an environment for reporters as artists.[245] Then Patterson discussed a piece by Tom Wolfe about the New Journalism in the *ASNE Bulletin*, an excerpt of Wolfe's eponymous book which was published later, saying "it lays out exactly what constitutes the New Journalism, in which I happen to believe." He embraced Wolfe's view that new nonfiction was as much about substantial and insightful reporting as it was

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[244] The *New York Herald Tribune* was of particular influence. As Bradlee wrote in his memoir, "Every newspaperman worth his pad and pencil had mourned the passing of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1966. Wherever they worked, journalists envied the Trib's style, its flair, its design, its fine writing, its esprit de corps." Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 302.

[245] Patterson included an extensive quote from Wicker: "First we must get the best people to work as journalists . . . good writers in the broadest literary sense . . . who in the best sense are the novelists of their time. The other thing we must do, having got all these good writers, we must create the kind of conditions in which they can do their best work. We can't do that by imposing formula writing, by group journalism. We are talking about artists." Eugene Patterson, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, June 1, 1971. See also, Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, September, 1970, 1.

about skillful writing. Patterson concluded his memo by making a case for incorporating some of the New Journalism techniques into the daily newspaper production.

> We need fewer exhibitions of moralistic, committed, romantic thoroughly conventional essay and more courage to do an *artist's reporting of universal reality*, not personal commitment, and the skill to put it together. We are talking about artists, which is what The Washington Post ought to be about, and not about tin ears who try to write rule.[246]

Patterson's view was just one piece in a larger context of internal debates, many of which are not documented in a paper trail, but it encapsulated and promoted particular elements of the Post's culture that were constitutive for establishing the Style section. It was also consistent with key elements of Bradlee's newsroom culture: good writing and substantial reporting, a star system based on skillful writers, and a desire to stay ahead of current trends in journalism. Eventually, the Style section would come together along the lines that Patterson had envisioned: without a dogmatic formula but based on a shared understanding to do "an artist's reporting of universal reality." Moreover, Patterson's intervention was also one of the earliest signs pointing at the larger significance of organizational practices that were consonant with Style's subculture. Far from being relegated to the margins of the newsroom, the style that Style cultivated was embraced and ultimately expanded into other sections of the paper.

Most of the writers were very much aware that they were part of an endeavor meant to shake up traditional journalistic patterns of reporting and writing. What they were doing, as Sally Quinn said looking back, "threw a grenade into old-school reporting."[247] Many of them considered themselves to be reporters *and* writers. Often their inspiration came from the emerging New Journalism. Judy Bachrach recalled, "I wanted to make everything I wrote

[246] Patterson, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, June 1, 1971, ECP. Emphasis added.
[247] Sally Quinn, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

a short story. Like in fiction. Like Tom Wolfe when he first started out or Gay Talese. Those were the people we not only studied at the Columbia School of Journalism but they came to us and talked to us. That was really cool. They really influenced us tremendously."[248] Henry Allen admired Tom Wolfe's "in the know wise guy treatment combined with brilliant prose," his "esoteric words" and how he was able to "play it high and low."[249] As he remembers it, when he arrived at he Post he realized that "the Style section is full of people who had been reading the same stuff."[250] Leonard Downie Jr., who was never part of the Style section but had been at the Post since 1964 and would succeed Ben Bradlee as executive editor in 1991, said, "We were all aware in the newsroom of the New Journalism. I remember looking for Tom Wolfe's pieces in New York magazine. I remember looking for those things and I remember people talking about it. So there was a kind of awareness of was going on."[251]

Over time, Style became notorious for its tone, which would run the gamut from snarky to satirical, from ironic to judgmental. At the same time, especially women reporters developed a reputation of insightful and incisive profile writers. The combination of Sally Quinn, Judy Bachrach, Myra McPherson and Nancy Collins was called, both reverently and disparagingly, "Murderer's Row."[252] Katharine Graham recounted a conversation with Henry Kissinger when he said: "Maxine Cheshire [the Post's gossip columnist] makes you want to commit murder. Sally Quinn, on the other hand, makes you want to commit suicide."[253]

This experimentation with new and different formats as well as with tone and voice was facilitated by Style's outsider status. "The women's page," as Nicholas von Hoffman told an audience of women's pages editors in the early 1970s, "is also freed form the

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[248] Bachrach, interview with the author.
[249] Allen, interview with the author.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Downie, interview with the author.
[252] McPherson, interview with the author.
[253] Aaron Latham, "Waking up with Sally Quinn," *New York*, July 16, 1973, 25.

conventional forms of presentation, the three of four W's, pyramid construction, all the things that allow us to kid ourselves into thinking formula writing is good writing, or even good journalism. About the only restraint put on many women's pages is that the material be connected with the lives of the readers, that they be shown why it might matter to them.[254]

Style's role in interpreting and giving form of cultural changes also opened opportunities for black reporters. Dorothy Gilliam became the first African-American and the first black women as editor at the Style section. In an oral history interview she recalled:

> I was the only black editor, the first black one back there. What they did was to give each of us a cluster of reporters with whom we worked. I was very interested. I sort of saw what I wanted [as] my goal, to bring some coherence to black culture, so I was able to make a number of hires and get a lot of, I thought, quite interesting things into the newspaper. So I was pleased with a lot of the things that we did. […] Unfortunately, some people at the paper seemed to think we were doing too many black stories. At one point somebody said they picked up the "Style" section and they thought it was the *Afro-American* [newspaper]. So that's the reality of the kind of things that happened.[255]

This kind of reporting was not only revolutionary for a "family newspaper" but also for a city that had been known as the "graveyard of journalism."[256]

After about five years, the basic elements of the Style section were in place: a consistent philosophy, a reliable work flow and productive collaborations between reporters and editors. While Larry Stern had created the foundation for Style's development, it was only with the leadership of editor Thomas Kendrick that the growing pains went away. He summarized the state of Style and his analysis of the road ahead in a memorandum to then-

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[254] Nicholas Von Hoffman, "Women's Pages: An Irreverent View," *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1971), 52.
[255] Dorothy Gilliam, oral history interview with Donita Moorhus, December 13, 1993: https://www.c-span.org/video/?299257-1/dorothy-gilliam-oral-history-interview
[256] Roberts, *Washington Post*, 468.

assistant editor Howard Simons. It is worth quoting the conclusion of this memo in its entirety as it identifies key ingredients of the narrative news logic that had taken hold at this point. Kendrick emphasized the importance of keeping the section experimental, he advocated the serious, hard news relevance of its content, and he made a case for embracing the narrative news logic as a promising way to capture the human side of the news. He wrote,

> Style's original concept holds. A number of subsidiary definitions of Style's role have even forged since its inception and this is as it should be. For many, these definitions seem hazy and that too, perhaps, is as it should be. It may well be a fatal error to define Style's role too strictly. The freedom to experiment, to gamble, to make mistakes (but not to repeat them) is basic to Style's charter. Such freedom is necessary to avoid the cardinal sin of dullness.
> Finally, *there should be an end to the attitude that Style is a soft, feature section* that can be ignored or curtailed in the crunch. *It feeds information that directly affects how people spend the leisure time that now occupies one-third of their lives.* Style's quick success and broad readership are evidence that its focus on people tapped and unfilled need. People are going to have more leisure time in the years ahead and their cultural interest will continue to expand. The political-governmental tunnel vision that this paper sometimes exhibits should not blind us to the possibility that our readers may be telling us that "people' are as important as facts," that Style's fare is much more than luxury.[257]

When the *Washington Post* published an anthology of the best stories from the Style Section in 1975, it was a testament to the evolution of the section into a cohesive entity that was actively promoted as innovative news content.[258] When Kendrick moved on to become the director of operations for the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts in 1976, Shelby Coffey took over the leadership of the Style section and became one of Bradlee's favorite

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[257] Thomas Kendrick, memorandum to Howard Simons, October 15, 1973. Courtesy of Evelyn Small. Emphasis added.

[258] Babb, *Writing in Style*. In the introduction, Kendrick wrote: "One certainty is that the old feature formula of a grabber lead, a lively if unfocused anecdote or two, direct quotes and a good kicker was abruptly exposed as curiously obsolescent, unable to cope with the cultural change and revival of individualism that was rolling across the country. That tide rose so high and fast in the '60s that daily journalism often foundered in its task of forging patterns from the chaotic data spewing out of newsroom teletypes." Thomas R. Kendrick, "Introduction," Ibid., i–xi, ii.

editors. Style was established.[259] In addition, the Post had reached the peak of reputation and cultural cachet. When stars and high society flocked to the Kennedy Center for the premiere of "All the President's Men," it was obvious that the Post had made the step from reporting the news to being in the news. Within ten years, Bradlee had elevated the Post from a "swamp town gazette"[260] to the hottest paper in the country. Moreover, Bradlee became a person of interest himself and his relationship with Style star writer Sally Quinn only added to the mystique.[261] Writing for Esquire in early 1976, James Fallows portrayed Bradlee and the Post in all their glory. "In the past ten years," Fallows wrote, "Bradlee has remade *The Post* in his own image, making it, at different times, the most exciting paper to work on, the most interesting one to read, and the one from which wrongdoers had most to fear."[262] Fallows called the Style section Bradlee's "clearest personal monument"[263] at the paper.

> What Bradlee saw in the section was illustrated by the kind of gossip it purveyed. Society sections everywhere carry gossip of the normal variety—who has been seen with whom. […] Style delivered this straight gossip by the ton, but it offered something else as well. It carried symbolic gossip, the novelistic details, the significant anecdotes that tell everything about the way the world works. So much of life within the government, so much of Washington society, could be explained as a game of manners—and Style did try to explain it.[264]

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[259] "Under Tom Kendrick, and later Shelby Coffey, the Style Section had gathered under one roof a unique collection of young 'new journalists,' like B. J. Phillips, Myra McPherson, and Nick von Hoffman, to name just a few, who wrote with vitality, imagery, and humor. They knew their subjects, and they shared their insights with great flair." Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 387.

[260] Allen, interview with the author; David Remnick put it this way: "To understand the scale of Bradlee's achievement, it is important to know something about the mediocrity with which he began. The Washington *Post* in 1965 not only had no claim to rivalry with the New York *Times* but could not even claim to be the best paper in its city. Ever since the *Post* bought out the *Times-Herald*, in 1954, it had been profitable, but as an editorial enterprise it still was simply not competitive. It was, like most newspapers everywhere, pretty awful." Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," 80.

[261] Quinn, *We're Going to Make You a Star*.

[262] Fallows, "Big Ben," 53.

[263] Ibid., 144. See also Jeffrey Toobin, "The Regular Guy," *The New Yorker*, March 20, 2000, 99: "For more than a decade after Bradlee founded the section, in 1969, Style developed a distinctive voice—bitchy, funny, sometimes smugly fatuous, but always readable."

[264] Fallows, "Big Ben," 144,146.

By describing and "explaining these games of manners," the *Washington Post* went beyond the traditional role of the press and its task to provide, in the words of the Post's early publisher Phil Graham, a "first rough draft of history." When the Style section highlighted the life world of politicians and people alike, attuned to changing attitudes, values and practices, it provided a first rough draft of culture.

Conclusion

The Style section continued to be the "prototype for daring, literary-minded newspaper feature sections throughout the country"[265] but in the early 1980s the *Washington Post* also suffered the biggest embarrassment of the Bradlee era—the Janet Cooke scandal. The fabricated piece about an eight-year old heroin addict did not appear in the Style section but it had larger implications for the practice of narrative journalism. The scandal pointed to some potential pitfalls of narrative journalism (i.e. ethics of reporting, sensationalism, melodrama), which became topics of heated debates throughout the 1980s and 1990s. *The Washington Post* was a pioneer and prototype in introducing the literary techniques used by the New Journalists into the daily newspaper production. "[Style stories] should be evaluated not as literature but as journalism with all its inherent strengths and faults," Kendrick wrote in the aforementioned introduction to the anthology of Style stories. "They carry both the bite of immediacy and deadline warts, the punch of individual perception and flaws exposed by time's perspective. Still, they hold up—proof that risks are worth taking, daily."[266]

[265] Jack Limpert, "David Laventhol, Ben Bradlee, and the Rise and Fall of Style," *About Editing and Writing* (blog), jacklimpert.com, April 10, 2015, http://jacklimpert.com/2015/04/david-laventhol-rise-fall-style/.
[266] Kendrick, "Introduction," v.

By introducing and supporting narrative techniques, the *Washington Post* played a significant role in changing both the form and the practices of daily journalism in newspapers. Practices changed because the routines of reporting and interviewing for narrative had to be accommodated by the infrastructure of daily newspaper production. At the same time, the form of narrative journalism also evolved since it anchored narrative innovations in a journalistic mindset and journalistic ethics that differed from the magazine or book industries.

Subsequently, the *Post's* innovation had significant effects on American newspaper journalism in the 1970s and thereafter. It provided a template for documentary writing and role models for narrative journalism, and laid the groundwork for a broader effort to incorporate magazine-like storytelling to the daily newspaper production. As other major American newspapers began developing their own "style" sections throughout the 1970s (*L.A. Times*, *Miami Herald*, *New York Times*), their indebtedness to the Post's trailblazing became obvious.[267] This transformation created occupational structures and literary incentives so that young, talented writers would seek out careers in journalism. It also led to the formation of a readership that would embrace narrative storytelling as an integral part of their daily newspaper diet.

In reconstructing the beginnings of the *Washington Post* Style section, this paper presented a case study documenting the emergence of a novel narrative news logic, a distinct form of news in American newspapers. This approach of conceptualizing news as a cultural

[267] As one example, see Edwin Diamond, *Behind the Times: Inside the New* New York Times (New York: Villard Books, 1993).

form[268] provided a lens to analyze the production, circulation and reception of narrative journalism in an early phase of its expansion.

[268] "Reporters breathe a specifically journalistic, occupational cultural air as well as the air they share with fellow citizens. The 'routines' of journalists are not only social, emerging out of interactions among officials, reporters and editors, but literary, emerging out of interactions of writers with literary traditions. More than that, journalists at work operate ~~d~~ not only to maintain and repair their social relations with sources and colleagues but their cultural image as journalists in the eyes of a wider world." Schudson, "Four Approaches," 77.

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE INNOVATION:

HOW STORYTELLING EXPANDED IN NEWSROOMS

By the late 1970s, the long-term decline of American newspapers could no longer be disputed. Television news provided an ever-increasing share of the information diet, leaving newspapers scrambling to figure out their roles in the daily lives of Americans. For the first time in generations, publishers and editors from different publications joined forces to fight back against readership loss. Newspapers were still making handsome profits but their growth rates were not keeping up with the overall population growth in the country. To differentiate themselves from television and radio news—both quicker to deliver information to audiences—newspapers editors began to focus on the quality of writing their publications could (and did) deliver. One of the signature initiatives during that time was the writing initiative launched by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE). It inaugurated writing awards for newspaper journalists, furthered research and training, and created outlets for promoting writing skills and monitoring best practices. While the original mandate did not focus on narrative writing as the main objective, over time a distinctive focus on the practices, ethics and implications of narrative writing emerged. Narrative required different reporting techniques and those techniques, different from those employed by the traditional reporter, required a rethinking and reimagining of daily practices. A distinct organizational logic for writing news —a narrative news logic—took shape: an interlinked set of journalistic forms and practices that emerged from doing narrative journalism in newspapers.

This chapter traces the institutionalization of this narrative news logic in daily newspaper production by analyzing key moments, events, developments and actors. Examining archival documents and analyzing proceedings as well as publications of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, it demonstrates how institutional efforts to elevate the quality of news writing coalesced with individual initiatives in newsrooms across the country to introduce and legitimate narrative writing in daily news production. It offers a nuanced description of how a new set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors emerged and how this novel news regime shaped the practices of media producers and the expectations of consumers in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will document and examine how the *St. Petersburg Times*[269] became a pioneering experiment and an exemplary case of how narrative journalism gained acceptance in daily news writing. Initiated by Eugene Patterson, the paper's editor-in-chief, and developed by Roy Peter Clark, then one of the industry's first writing coaches, the writing improvement program at the *St. Petersburg Times* became a prototype within ASNE where Patterson also served as a president during that time. The next section focuses on ASNE in more detail and illuminates how narrative journalism was debated, embraced and contested across the industry. My analysis provides evidence showing how ASNE's initiatives created a shared vocabulary, incentives and structures for sustaining narrative journalism as a legitimate journalistic practice. But the standards and practices were still very much a work in progress, as evidenced by the boundaries violated by the Janet Cooke scandal, which I will review in a separate section. Examining the scandal illustrates how journalists and editors engaged in animated debates about the boundaries of narrative journalism. These controversies culminated in a collective effort to reject literary

[269] Now called the *Tampa Bay Times*.

license and reconcile narrative techniques with journalistic norms and values. Even before the Cooke scandal, however, narrative journalists had already begun to explain and create awareness for their narrative approach to news, rethinking and reimagining daily reporting techniques. To illuminate what this process looked like—before and beyond the Cooke scandal—the following section examines the rhetoric of award-winning journalists and offers insights into the ways in which narrative techniques were justified and promoted both within newsrooms and across the industry. This chapter ends in the mid-1980s when narrative writing—both in feature sections as well as in news sections—had been validated with prestigious awards and had established as a distinct form of news writing in daily newspaper writing.

As this chapter will show, the newspaper industry eventually acknowledged the qualities of narrative journalism and accepted its techniques (to varying degrees depending on the specific context) as legitimate journalistic practice. Illuminating how the narrative form of journalism was embraced, resisted and negotiated by reporters and editors will shed light on new formats and demonstrate how they required the rethinking of routines in daily print journalism. Ultimately, I put forward the thesis that the industry-wide implementation of narrative journalism in American newspapers was equally a result of boundary work within journalism and a response to social, economic, political and cultural forces. In doing so, I combine an institutional focus with cultural analysis, demonstrating shifting dynamics and mutual interactions between organizational, institutional and cultural variables.

The purpose of this chapter is both descriptive and explanatory. It provides an "institutionally situated history"[270] of narrative journalism's emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At the same time, it combines elements of institutional and cultural analysis as

[270] Pauly, "The New Journalism."

well as boundary work to explain the transformation of American news writing in this time period. Journalism history, as James Carey famously argued, is the "history of the idea of a report: its emergence among a certain group of people as a desirable form of rendering reality, its changing fortunes, definitions, and redefinitions over time."[271] This chapter, then, demonstrates how narrative journalism became a "desirable form of rendering reality" in American newspapers between the late 1970s and mid-1980s.

Improving Writing through Storytelling

In the late 1970s the American newspaper industry was highly profitable, yet faced with a structural problem: while the population was growing, circulation was stagnating. During the 1970s the adult population grew by 19 percent and the number of households by 25 percent. Yet, the circulation of newspapers did not change. Network television was encroaching on the market share as more information and entertainment options—cable and satellite television—were already on the horizon. Newspapers had adapted to the changing American media diet by introducing lifestyle sections, adding full-color Sunday magazines, improving graphics and enhancing their business performance (distribution, marketing, sharing of printing resources).[272] In addition, the public image of journalism was changing from a positive view in the wake of the Watergate coverage to a more skeptical outlook. When the country as a whole was experiencing a "crisis of confidence" the press was going through a crisis of credibility.[273]

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[271] Carey, "Journalism History," 90.
[272] Matthew Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960-1980" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2016).
[273] Howard H. Hays Jr., "How Should We Cope with the Erosion of Our Audience?" *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 632 (April 1980): 11-13.

In this context, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) decided to play a more visible role in elevating the quality of newspaper content and initiated a writing improvement program. Efforts at ASNE to improve writing at American newspapers began in 1976. It was at a board meeting in Honolulu when the assembled editors were debating issues of circulation, advertising and budget departments, that Tim Hays, the editor of the *Riverside (Calif.) Press-Enterprise* reportedly said: "We are neglecting a job we supposedly are best equipped to handle. That is, improving writing in our papers. If we can't do that, we might as well quit."[274] In 1977 ASNE officially launched a writing improvement program "in the belief that if we can improve our writing, theoretically that would help improve readership."[275] One of the leading figures in these efforts was Eugene C. Patterson, the editor-in-chief of the *St. Petersburg (Fl.) Times*, who wanted his paper to become a test case for what improving writing in a newspapers could look like. The *Times* had a good reputation as one of the best smaller newspapers in the country but Patterson was thinking about ways to improve the paper. He deemed it "flat and uninspired."[276] Other newspapers had been experimenting with narrative formats but the *St. Petersburg Times* was unique in how it launched a writing improvement program that eventually became the prototype for efforts in newspapers throughout the country.[277]

In the following, I examine this one-year experiment as it constituted one of the first attempts to rethink and reimagine daily news writing. Moreover, this account demonstrates how the *St. Petersburg Times* developed templates that were later adopted or emulated by newsrooms across the United States.

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[274] Thomas Winship, "Announcing: Annual ASNE Writing Awards." *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 611 (December/January 1978): 12.
[275] Michael Gartner, "What ASNE Is Doing to Help Find Out." *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 606 (July/August 1977).
[276] As quoted in Timothy Leland, "Lilt and Lyricism on the News Pages" *Boston Globe*, May 12, 1978.
[277] Examples include *Washington Post*, *L.A. Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Miami Herald.*

Patterson had heard from a young English professor at the University of Auburn in Montgomery, Alabama, who might be of help in this effort. His name was Roy Peter Clark. Patterson emphasized that improving newspaper writing was not just a goal of the *St. Petersburg Times* but also of ASNE where Patterson would be the incoming president later that year. His expectations for the young English professor were ambitious. Patterson wanted Clark to "enliven the tired blood of literary hacks who quit learning when they started writing for newspapers"[278] and in another letter called him the "white hope of academe to provide the practical means of illumination by which the news business can find its way back from darkness toward literacy."[279] In the summer of 1977, Clark was hired as a writing consultant, initially for one year, and expected to work with editors and reporters in the *St. Petersburg Times*, de facto becoming the industry's first full-time writing coach.[280]

The paper did not systematically evaluate how reporters and editors anticipated the experience but it asked their staff after the year-long experience about their initial reaction to the news that the paper had hired a college English professor to teach writing in the newsroom. It is worth quoting these collected responses at length because they indicate the wide spectrum reservations and an elevated level of skepticism and distrust.

> I was skeptical. I had qualms. I was very suspicious. It sounded awful. I wondered just what kind of a turkey he would be. I thought back to all the college English professors I had ever had and said, 'Jesus Christ!' I was okay until I heard he didn't know anything about newspapers, had never written for a newspaper story on deadline, had never set foot in a newspaper, and then I began to wonder how could this Ph.D. possibly be able to tell me anything when he doesn't know anything about what daily newspaper writing is. I feared he'd be an agent of management, reporting back to [executive editor] Haiman and Patterson about flaws in my writing. I thought Patterson had finally flipped a wig.[281]

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278 Letter from Eugene C. Patterson to Roy Peter Clark, January 24, 1977, ECP.
279 Letter from Eugene C. Patterson to Roy Peter Clark, March 14, 1977, ECP.
280 That same summer, the *Sacramento Bee* hosted Serrell Hillman, a professor at the University of Hawaii, for three months to tutor reporters about writing. But there was no follow-up and this project did not receive any attention later on. It was only mentioned in a letter between ASNE board editors. Letter from Michael Gartner to Michael O'Neill on October 11, 1977, ECP.
281 *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1978 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1978, 176.

The initial expectations indicate the cultural climate in the newsroom (as elsewhere in the industry) and resonate with a large body of journalism research describing journalistic practice as a highly routinized activity, shaped by organizational constraints and professional frames.[282] For many reporters at the *St. Petersburg Times*, bringing in an outsider signaled a disruption of routines, a potential threat to the journalistic self-understanding and a challenge to the *esprit de corps* of the newspaper. The St. Petersburg newsroom, as other papers during that era, reflected a common understanding of journalism as straight news reporting and a culture of entrenched practices geared towards satisfying specific editorial standards guided by the ideal of objectivity.[283] Against this backdrop, Clark introduced tools that easily fit into familiar practices but also opened opportunities to reflect on the craft of writing.

Clark applied three main strategies to engage with reporters and work towards the goal of improving writing in the newsroom but in the context of this study I will focus on only one specific initiative.[284] First, he sat down for individual session, interviewed reporters about their writing routines and reviewed articles looking for strengths and weaknesses. Second, each week he selected an example of good journalistic writing that served as starting point for general debates about good writing during brown bag lunches. Third, a weekly newsletter called "The Wind Bag," Clark discussed the writing at the newspaper, provided examples of good writing and reflected on general issues of news writing. It is this latter

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[282] Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*; Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Schudson, *Discovering the News*; Schudson, *Sociology*; Tuchman, *Making News*.

[283] David T. Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[284] 1) He sat down for individual session, interviewed reporters about their writing routines and reviewed articles looking for strengths and weaknesses. 2) Each week he selected an example of good journalistic writing that served as starting point for general debates about good writing.

element of Clark's activities that I will examine in more detail. Even though narrative writing and its improvement was not a declared goal in these endeavors, certain aspects of narrative storytelling rose to the surface and got actively promoted as exemplary forms of good journalistic practice. Moreover, elevating writing to a topic of conversation in the newsroom created a space for stretching the boundaries of what daily journalism in the newspaper could look like.

The newsletter served as a platform to discuss writing in general but also to differentiate between various kinds of stories that required different approaches. In some instances this created an opportunity to discuss the usefulness of narrative writing. In Wind Bag #13, for example, Clark juxtaposes two versions of a news story and discusses differences. In both cases the headline reads, "Boy trying to save his dog is hit by train, loses leg" but while the first version was written in a straight news style, the second employs a more narrative structure. The first version begins with a traditional hard news lead: "While trying to save his fuzzy, new puppy on a train trestle, a 10-year old boy fell beneath the wheels of an Amtrak passenger train and lost both his legs below the knee." In contrast, the second version begins by setting the scene:

> The last day of their precious holiday vacation found James Harper, his dog Misty and their friend Jeff Tawzer shuffling along the graying, metal train trestle spanning the Hillsborough River.
> Like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn exploring the banks of the Big Muddy, 10-year old James, 12-year old Jeff and many other children must have mapped the paths that lace the tall grass along the river and shinnied up the tail, thick trees that flourish on its banks.

The specific information about how the boy lost his leg is only presented in the ninth paragraph: "Somehow, James slipped and his legs were caught and completely severed below the knees by the metal wheels." For Clark this contrast "illustrate[s] some interesting

problems about news writing." Apparently aware of the traditional news environment he writes: "No doubt, some will be turned off by the second version. You have to read well into the story to get the hard news. And the analogy of the two wandering boys to Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn may seem gratuitous. These are valid criticisms." Following up on this introductory statement, Clark emphasizes the benefits of a narrative approach: "I find the second version more readable for a number of reasons: 1) the hard news is right there in the headline and need not be repeated in the lead; 2) the narrative approach gives the story a more coherent structure—a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end; 3) the narrative carries the reader through the story and gives him more incentive to read the whole thing." Framing the discussion along these line indicates that a narrative approach to news writing was not necessarily a common practice during this era at the paper. But, more generally, it also indicates a mentality that was reluctant to embrace other forms of news writing.

Clark's arguments are illuminating because they reflect and anticipate larger debates about lending legitimacy to narrative writing in daily newspaper journalism. He argues that a narrative approach does not take away from conveying information but, to the contrary, even enhances the content and experience of the story. Clark complements his assessment with interviews of the writer and the editor of the story (Frank DeLoache and Steve Nohlgren respectively). When asked about the difference in style, DeLoache explains that the first version was written on deadline for the first edition. Then the editor suggested a rewrite. "We figured most people will have heard the story on TV," DeLoache said. "If not, when they read this headline they'll know that a boy lost his legs. So what the TV couldn't paint in pictures…the description of the area…that's what we thought we'd feature." Nohlgren, the editor, emphasizes the point that there was something in the story that warranted a different treatment. He was intrigued by the description of the neighborhood

and the setting and felt that there "was something that was drawing the children there and may have played part in the disaster." His goal was to sustain that mood and tell the story in a narrative way. As Nohlgren said, "You can almost always re-create an event better with straight narration than you can in a more convoluted fashion often imposed by newswriting."

While this example is a singular instance in one particular newspaper, it illustrates a number of important factors in the emergence of narrative journalism. Narrative writing emerged from within the practice of daily journalism but it required a certain initiative by editors and writers. In a different context, the reporter might not have included descriptive, sensory details in the first place and the second version might not have been produced at all if it had not been triggered by encouragement from the editor. Moreover, the narrative approach allowed the story to carry specific pieces of information that not only set it apart from other media (television) but also from straight news reporting. As Nohlgren pointed out, narrative writing may serve explanatory purposes when it points out circumstances that "may have played part in the disaster." These explanations are more implied than stated and thus subvert the traditional requirement of solely including information that can be attributed, excluding all kinds of personal judgment or interpretation. The reporter is not arguing that particular circumstances explain everything but his narrative approach thickens the texture of the news article offering the reader some context for the incident. Yet, as Clark cautions in his interpretation, this approach "would not work for some stories." He mentions an example of a breaking news story about a murder case where a narrative lead would be inappropriate. Overall, this brief analysis in the Wind Bag is also instructive in showing how Clark used his role as a writing coach to discuss alternative ways of doing journalism. While the impulse for this particular story came out of the newsroom, Clark put

narrative writing on the agenda and provided a frame of reference to discuss its strengths and weaknesses in a newsroom environment.

Evaluating the impact of this year-long experiment cannot rely on quantifiable data, but evidence indicates that most reporters and editors at the *St. Petersburg Times* considered this experience as rewarding both on a personal and professional level. When asked for evaluations, many reporters said they were thinking more about their writing and took more pride in what they were doing. Some staff members noticed a cultural change in the newsroom, as this comment by a young reporter indicates:

> [Clark] has raised the consciousness of the staff to good writing. In the old days if you walked around the newsroom and just listened to what people were saying, you would hear people talking about reporting problems and production problems, not about writing and editing problems. They would be talking about deadlines, about cops who were withholding information, about councilmen who were holding secret meetings, about terminals which were not working, about photo orders which got lost, about having to go early with the first editions because we had a big run and a collapsed press. But we are supposed to be writers as well as reporters, and you hardly ever heard anybody talking about writing in the city room. Now you hear people all the time talking about leads and transitions and analogies and similes and imagery and usage and symbolism and quotes and color and even poetry. In the old days one reporter might call another over to check out a fact on some history on a story which occurred before he arrived. Now you hear people asking their friends to come over to their terminal and check out the writing style of their story before they turn in a piece.[285]

All taken together, this year-long initiative forged a culture of writing, created an "interpretive community"[286] and established rules and rituals for embedding narrative journalism in the daily newspaper production. Moreover, this experiment at the *St. Petersburg Times,* far from being an isolated instance, would become an exemplary case in the newspaper industry. As the next section will show, it was highly praised and widely advertised during ASNE conventions and in the ASNE Bulletin.

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[285] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1978 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1978, 176-177.
[286] Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously.*

Institutional Initiatives at the American Society of Newspaper Editors

The writing improvement program at ASNE coincided with the organization's desire to become a more powerful player in the newspaper industry. After years of having been "too loosely structured" and "too narrowly focused," ASNE wanted to "become a really major policymaking force in the council of publishers."[287] The organization actively lobbied for a seat at the table of the newly founded "Newspaper Readership Project," an initiative in association with the National Advertising Bureau and the American Newspaper Publishers Association to increase the readership of newspapers. While it might seem obvious that writing would be an important topic for editors, these conversations in the late 1970s actually indicated a renewed interest.[288] Subsequent contributions in trade journals, journalism reviews and other outlets indicate that the topic of writing constituted a relatively new topic for debates within the industry.[289]

Against this backdrop and guided by the editors' goal to improve content in newspapers, the ASNE *Bulletin* also became an important platform for debates about writing. Editors discussed issues such as a general appreciation of writing (writing matters), basics and mechanics (clarity, precision, correct use) as well as complex ideas (good writing comes from good reporting; narrative writing). And again, while the collective efforts focused more on writing in general, these conversations created a public forum for reflecting not only on

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[287] Michael O'Neill, "What ASNE Is Doing to Help Find Out," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 606 (July/August 1977): 12.

[288] Edward Allen, "Encouraging good writing" in *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 625 (July/August, 1979): 3-5. See also James Ragdale [Editor of the *New Bedford* (Mass.) *Standard-Time*]: "Until the past decade or so, only a few daily newspapers in this country regularly blessed good writing. In fact, over the years some of the best writing has appeared in weekly newspapers. Now, more and more editors are learning what good writers have known all along: Good readers need good writers. Newspaper managements seem to be coming around to the notion that good writing means more than clean copy-although good writing usually is that, too." Ibid.: 6-7.

[289] "I like the idea of the ASNE's recruiting someone to help newspapers improve their writing. God knows most papers, including the Observer, are too frequently dull, dull, dull, and on most days aren't worth the money they charge. We sometimes ought to pay readers to read us." Letter from Stuart Dim to Pete McKnight, August 5, 1977 [forwarded to Roy Peter Clark, August 24, 1977], ECP.

the nuts and bolts of technique but also on the purpose and possibilities of alternatives to traditional news writing. When thinking about writing, editors had an opportunity to formulate how they envisioned the successful combination of reporting and writing. As some editors argued, the best writing was not just clear and concise but added a certain sparkle. For Claude Sitton, *The News & Observer* and *The Raleigh Times*, the best newspaper writing "captures the essence of the subject in a concise and interesting manner and that […] *reflects exceptional imagination in construction and approach* to the subject." When Jim Hoge of *Chicago Sun-Times/Daily News* was asked what he would like the writing award to merit he responded that they "should *reflect the emotional and intellectual range of journalism*. We enlighten, provoke and entertain."[290] Both statements offer rather general definitions that may apply to a variety of different styles but by connecting good writing with imagination and emphasizing the intellectual and emotional range of journalism, these quotes illustrate how journalism's boundaries may be (and eventually were) expanded beyond routinized, formulaic news writing.

The ferment of improving writing in the field of newspapers was particularly visible during the annual ASNE conference in 1978 when Patterson was the incoming president of the organization. The conference offered a stage for Patterson to advertise the St. Petersburg experiment to editors from around the country and allowed him to stake out his personal philosophy. In his president's report, Patterson set the tone and sketched an agenda for expanding the editors' role in defining the role of journalism in the changing media environment of the late 1970s. He argued that journalism had developed from the "obedient press" in the 1950s towards "adversary journalism" in the 1960s and 1970s. The latter made for "a sturdier press and a stronger society." Yet, Patterson warns that "throwing rocks at

[290] Quoted in Thomas Winship, "Announcing: Annual ASNE Writing Awards," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 611 (December/January 1978): 12. Emphasis added.

authority is not enough" and suggests some kind of "better reporting of issues" as the way forward.

> It might be called explanatory journalism. In that new dimension we would commit to the goal of telling an issue whole—taking greater responsibility for bringing clarity to the pros and cons of it—*with simplicity which can only spring from a writer's comprehension*. Just as a major part of our adversary role is to watch those who exercise power, we carry a companion obligation to be guides to the people so that they can more clearly comprehend the issues which the wielders of power may be managing and mismanaging, and especially those vital issues they may be avoiding.[291]

It is noticeable that Patterson not only advocated for a different kind of journalism that was more attuned to issues and explanatory in nature. He also tied its practice to a "simplicity which can only spring from a writer's comprehension." The nuance is important here. Patterson is implying that proficient writing produces better comprehension by making complex issues accessible. Importantly, he is arguing that the reporter is not merely a human recording device but someone who brings intelligence and comprehension (i.e. subjectivity) to an understanding of the story. Patterson (in his institutional role as leader of the industry) was suggesting that a better grasp of both content and form made for better journalism insofar as it allowed readers to "more clearly comprehend the issues." Patterson's idea of explanatory journalism did not propose a specific form of writing but narrative journalism, as already practiced in newsrooms around the country, certainly fit the bill of highlighting issues in a different way than straight news reporting.

Writing and the improvement of writing took center stage at a panel titled "Can Writing Be Taught?" It also provided a platform for Roy Peter Clark to personally and for the first time interact with the assembled ASNE community. As during his time in the newsroom, Clark emphasized that good writing was a result of both mastering the practice

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[291] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1978 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1978, 87.

and creating an environment that values the written word. Raising awareness and improving morale were important parts of the picture, he argued. Clark took editors on a tour d'horizon of what better writing in newspapers could look like. He described his activities at the *St. Petersburg Times* (The Wind Bag, weekly lunches) and offered specific tips and guidelines for implementing similar initiatives in newsrooms. He concluded his presentation by establishing a direct connection between core journalistic values and the importance of clear, precise and imaginative journalistic writing. "Good writing may help you sell newspapers," he said, "but good writing also has important political implications for a democracy. […] On the top page of the editorial page of the St. Petersburg Times is a quotation from Paul Poynter, publisher of the paper from 1912 to 1950: 'The policy of our paper is very simple—merely to tell the truth.' Let us all tell the truth and tell it well."[292] This rhetorical move connects good writing with the self-image of journalists as bearers of the democratic torch and argues that the core mission of journalism can only be carried out when attuned to the specifics of language. In doing so, he made the case that writing was not something decorative outside the purview of journalism but part of its substance.

Clark's presentation and the St. Petersburg experience sparked interest for launching writing initiatives and spurred experimentation in newsrooms across the country, as numerous articles in trade journals, journalism reviews and other correspondence between editors document. After the 1978 conference, more than 1,500 copies of a special report on writing that Clark had produced were distributed by the ASNE secretary to editors and

[292] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1978 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1978, 175.

reporters.[293] Within the next three years, Clark would give 50 seminars in 27 states with most interest from papers whose circulation ranged from 15,000 to 75,000.[294]

Newsrooms began initiating their own writing improvement efforts. *The New York News*, for example, launched a newsletter called "The Printer's Devil" in December of 1979. Its aim was to heighten awareness for the need of good writing.[295] The *Nashville Banner* set up a writing program that included individual sessions with reporters to discuss their writing habits and technique.[296] The *Orlando Sentinel Star* appointed its best writer to be the main editor on the features desk and serve as a writing coach.[297] The *Boston Globe*—which had hired Donald Murray, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, as a temporary writing coach—decided to name columnist Alan Richman an assistant manager for writing.[298] Newspapers organized writing seminars and internal workshops in places like Green Bay and Wausau, Wisconsin, Elmira, New York, and Indianapolis, Indiana.[299] Regional conferences across the country emphasized the importance of creating an atmosphere that was sensitive to writing.[300] In 1980, two years after his original presentation

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293 American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1980 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1980, 111. See also *The Editors' Exchange* 2, no. 1 (January 1979), ECP.
294 David Shaw, "Smoothing Out the First Rough Draft of History" *Columbia Journalism Review* (December 1981): 28.
295 *The Editors' Exchange* 2, no. 1 (January 1979), ECP
296 *The Editors' Exchange* 2, no. 10 (October 1979), ECP.
297 *The Editors' Exchange* 2, no. 12 (December 1979), ECP.
298 *The Editors' Exchange* 4, no. 2 (February 1981), ECP. The *Tallahassee Democrat* also created the position of an Assistant Managing Editor of Writing. See Roy Peter Clark, ed., *Best Newspaper Writing* (St. Petersburg: Modern Media Institute, 1982), xii.
299 Associated Press Media Editors, "How do we write? The problem … The Treatment … The Training: A Report by the Writing & Editing Committee (San Diego, California, November 9-12, 1982), ECP; American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1982 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1982, 30-32; *The Editors' Exchange* 5, no. 7 (August 1982), ECP; *The Editors' Exchange* 7, no. 2 (February 1984), ECP; *The Editors' Exchange* 7, no. 2 (February 1984), ECP.
300 For instance, the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation at seminars in 1978 in Charlotte, N.C., and El Paso, Tex. *The Editors' Exchange* 2, no. 1 (January 1979), ECP.

to ASNE editors, Clark presented further evidence that writing initiatives in individual newsrooms had picked up momentum.[301] And he looked optimistically into the future.

> I foresee a great time ahead for newspaper writing. We have purged ourselves of the abuses of the New Journalism—the self-indulgent overwriting, the composite characters, the interior monologues. But we have absorbed into everyday news reporting many of the techniques of that movement: setting scenes, using perspective, letting characters speak, using significant detail.[302]

Adopting narrative techniques in daily news production, however, was still being contested within the industry. While certain editors actively promoted new formats, styles and content—often looking to magazines for inspirations, others perceived these changes as a turn towards "last-gas 'daily magazines' " and instead advocated for "a hard line for hard news."[303] Moreover, some editors and observers had the uneasy feeling that narrative writing signified a triumph of style over substance, a turn towards "soft and sexy" and the danger that reporters "will spend more time searching for flashy metaphors and dramatic stories than for verifiable facts and legitimate news."[304] This tension between narrative journalism's possibilities and its pitfalls became a central issue with the Janet Cooke Scandal in 1981.

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[301] "So we hear the call for good writing from editors all over the country. We hear it at the Minneapolis Tribune, where at the insistence of the staff, English teacher Dave Wood was brought to work with the writers. We hear it at *The Christian Science Monitor*, where Lucille De View is working with young writers; at the Honolulu Advertiser, where Roger Tatarian worked with the staff; at the *Reading (PA) Eagle and Times*, where Lawrence Suhre helped beef up the skills of copy editors; at the *Orlando Sentinel Star*, where June Smith recently turned writing coach; at the *Anderson (S.C.) Daily Mail*, where Mark Etheridge undertook a summer's writing project. The writing coach has become a new profession. The *Boston Globe* has a fine one, Don Murray. And the Globe may soon create a position called the Writing Editor." […] "Seminars and workshops have popped up everywhere. Joe Ungaro has set up a series of workshops with guest speakers for the staff of the Westchester-Rockland Newspapers; API will hold its third seminar devoted exclusively to writing and editing this July; SNPA will have another one next week." *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1980 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1980, 115.

[302] *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1980 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1980, 118.

[303] Joseph W. Shoquist, "A Hard Line for Hard News" *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 634 (July/August 1980): 11; In contrast, Ted Natt urged newspaper editors to learn from the innovations at magazines such as New York whose "success formula" he described as "good writing, tight editing and some of the most imaginative graphics uses in mass media publishing anywhere." *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 606 (July/August 1977): 8.

[304] David Shaw, "Smoothing Out the First Rough Draft of History," *Columbia Journalism Review* (December 1981): 28.

The Janet Cooke Scandal

There was no bigger challenge to narrative writing in newspapers in the 1980s than the Janet Cooke scandal. When the *Washington Post* had to forfeit a Pulitzer Prize in feature writing because it was discovered that its reporter Janet Cooke had fabricated the story of an 8-year-old heroin addict in Washington D.C., the ensuing debates provided a platform for the journalistic community to discuss the merits and flaws of narrative techniques.[305] On the surface, the scandal was about anonymous sources, confidentiality and the relationship between reporters and editors as well as the changing status of black reporters in American newsrooms. At the same time it also reflected the newspaper industry's coming to terms with changes in reporting routines and writing conventions.[306] While the "Jimmy's World" episode was not exclusively a debate about narrative techniques, it turned into a debate about narrative storytelling and the legacy of New Journalism. Even though there was widespread consensus that lying and inventing characters were egregious transgressions, some journalists and editors used the scandal to put narrative journalism on trial. Examining these debates illustrates conflicted attitudes and approaches to narrative storytelling in newspapers. And analyzing these debates within the journalistic community brings to light an exemplary case

[305] Cooke had done a lot of reporting on the drug problem in Washington D.C. and had talked to a variety of social workers, city officials and drug rehabilitation researchers. But as she was quoted after the scandal broke, "It was a fabrication. I did so much work on it, but it's a composite." Bill Green, "The Confession," *The Washington Post*, April 19, 1981.

[306] My analysis is inspired by David Eason's influential study "On authority" and follows some of its conclusions. See David L. Eason, "On Journalistic Authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3, no. 4 (1986). Yet, while Eason looked at the case in terms of asserting authority, my interest lies in examining how and to what extent the journalistic community discussed the functions of narrative reporting and writing. Eason did not see any narrative value in Cooke's story. He wrote, "The story, designed to draw attention to the heroin problem in the city, was formally an unexceptional human interest story." Ibid., 431. In a way he was defending narrative journalism by saying, this is not narrative journalism just a "human interest story." But—independent from judging Jimmy's World as warranting literary merit or not—it became a general discussion about narrative techniques.

of boundary work, a collective effort to identify "good" journalism, purge unfitting practices and renew journalists' authority.[307]

The Jimmy story had all the ingredients of a powerful piece of narrative journalism: a compelling character (an eight-year old addict), scene setting (the "ghetto" in southeast Washington D.C.), descriptive details and vivid images ("The needle slides into the boy's soft skin like a straw pushed into the center of a freshly baked cake."), dialogue, a social issue of great importance (heroin), news value (information about a new strand of heroin), and expert witnesses (DEA officer, medical experts, social workers).[308] The scandal triggered widespread and diverse responses from other newspapers and media organizations, often focusing on the admissibility of anonymous sources and the boundaries of confidentiality. Yet, two of the *Post's* major competitors on the national level also framed the scandal in terms of narrative journalism. For the *Wall Street Journal*, the scandal raised "some broader and troublesome issues" including the question "Are the competitive pressures of big-city newsrooms such that style and form are overtaking substance?"[309] And Jonathan Friendly of *The New York Times* wrote:

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[307] Boundary work has its roots in the sociology of knowledge. See Thomas Gieryn, "Boundary-work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983). Matt Carlson provides a succinct definition: "Struggles over journalism are often struggles over boundaries. Basic questions of definition—who counts as a journalist, what counts as journalism, what is appropriate journalistic behavior, and what is deviant—are all matters that can be comprehended through the perspective of 'boundary work.' " Matt Carlson, "Introduction: The Many Boundaries of Journalism," in *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation,* eds. Matt Carlson and Seth C. Lewis (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 7. By analyzing "discursive battles over control" and examining "material connections involved in coordination" boundary work adds crucial conceptual tools that help illuminate the emergence, evolution and expansion of narrative journalism in American newspapers. In this particular context, boundary work helps explain how narrative journalism (its participants, practices and particular journalistic norms) established a challenge to "traditional" news reporting and pushed the boundaries of what constituted journalism.

[308] While most readers probably reacted to the content of the story, some also noticed the particular form of the article, as letters to the editor indicate. The immediate reaction to the narrative form was mixed. For Martha S. Stewart the story "was descriptive reportage at its best." Martha S. Steward, "Letter to the Editor," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1980. On the other hand, Sharron Jackson expressed outrage that "the article was written as if it were a story about an 8-year-old's day in the park." Sharron Jackson, "Letter to the Editor," *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1980.

[309] "Capital Offense", *Wall Street Journal*, April 17, 1981.

> Many reporters and editors criticized what has come to be called the "new journalism," in which the writer presents as emotionally true composite characters who do not exist, vivid scenes he never saw and bright conversations he never heard. They said they were worried that the cachet such writing had been given would lead younger reporters in particular into trying to present it as actual reportage.[310]

Synthesizing and analyzing several interviews with editors and journalists, these two interpretations indicated the industry's discomfort with narrative techniques in daily news journalism and reflected a deep-seated suspicion that narrative style could be reconciled with journalistic substance.[311] In the aftermath of the scandal, journalists and editors were trying to evaluate whether the Cooke's transgression was just an individual aberration or if there were any patterns that warranted closer scrutiny. For numerous observers and commentators, it was obvious that since the 1960s something had changed in journalism. The question was just how best to describe this change and its impact. The new journalism became a common short-cut to talk about any writing that veered away from traditional norms and practices as the techniques of the New Journalists had filtered into the daily newspaper production, challenging organizational routines and the editorial mindsets. While some editors and reporters found ways to reconcile these new practices with journalistic imperatives of accuracy and accountability, others struggled to grasp the distinct qualities of narrative reporting and writing. The latter associated narrative techniques with *fictional* storytelling, understood as something that was invented, instead of storytelling *like* in *fiction*, understood as employing particular tools and structural techniques such as character, dialogue and plot. New Journalism had become a foil, the other, to banish everything that was undermining traditional journalism. Critics of narrative practices applied some of the

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[310] Jonathan Friendly, "Falsification Of Prize Article Puts A Spotlight On How Newspapers Check" *The New York Times*, April 17, 1981.

[311] "I contend that The Post's overheated striving for "style" in news reporting left the newspaper wide open to being deceived as it was." Don Porter [D.C. bureau chief, King Broadcasting Co.], "Letter to the Editor, *The Washington Post*, April 18, 1981.

New Journalism's practices—inventions, composite characters, literary license—to any kind of narrative writing by journalists. What they overlooked was that New Journalism equally emphasized thorough reporting, immersion in a subject's world and an appreciation of all things human.

It was not just literary writing and its alleged blurring of fact and fiction that caused consternation but, more generally, the shift towards analytical and interpretive journalism. An editorial in the *Washington Star* diagnosed that "newspapers began to fear that the old who-what-where-when formula wasn't quite measuring up and began experimenting with 'news analysis' and 'background' stories, calling upon reporters not merely to report the 'facts' but to place them in context and perspective. Raw information was to be augmented by meaning."[312] Yet, for some commentators the emergence of narrative journalism was not a bad development at all. The *Columbia Journalism Review*, while pointing out the Cooke scandal was a "cautionary tale about a significant change that has been taking place in the way newspaper reporters and editors see their jobs," provided a succinct appreciation of narrative journalism' impact:

> For twenty years or so, reporters on the *Washington Post* and other newspapers have been at pains to go beyond the chronicling of daily happenings on clearly defined beats, and to report on how groups of people—women, blacks, migrant workers, singles in suburbia, illegal Mexican immigrants, residents of particular neighborhoods—live, and how they feel about their lives. Journalists have become anthropologists, and works of anthropology are held up as models for students at journalism schools. The results have often been impressive. Indeed, there should be more reporting of this kind […].[313]

Out of this debate about the merits or flaws of narrative practices emerged three general themes. 1) For some editors and journalists narrative had no place in daily newspaper journalism. "This Janet Cooke story," wrote Lawrence Kaggwa, chairman of the Department

[312] Editorial, "New Look On New Journalism," *Washington Star*, April 21, 1981.
[313] "Exploring Jimmy's world," *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1981): 28.

of Journalism at Howard University, "should caution the *Washington Post* and other newspapers using 'new journalism'—fiction techniques—to cut back on it and go back to traditional newswriting standards."[314] For one commentator, the handling of the inquiry by the ombudsman at the *Post* was just another example how reconstruction and nonattribution lead to "stories without warts" that represented "a reversion to a very old journalism that told the story for the story's sake; much of it was called yellow."[315]

2) Faced with such criticism of New Journalism and its alleged techniques, some of its practitioners and proponents spoke out to fight back against generalizations. Their arguments emphasize that narrative writing and meticulous reporting are not mutually exclusive. Clay Felker, a pioneer of featuring narrative journalism in *New York* magazine and then the editor of Newsday's afternoon edition, was quoted saying: "What is important, is to get the story right and then put it into a readable form. The techniques shouldn't lead to any distortion of the facts or the truth."[316] Felker and others blamed young and inexperienced writers for getting carried away and inventing stories. And Tom Wolfe, the godfather of New Journalism, said that fictionalizing journalistic stories was "as if you've violated the rules of your own game. There's great satisfaction in taking the actual facts insofar as you can get them and turning this material into something that is as engrossing as fiction, and in some cases more so, when you succeed."[317]

3) A third strand of arguments validated the contributions and innovations of the New Journalism but blamed some of its practitioners for having spread the gospel too far. "Devices credible in expert hands became tawdry when promiscuously or amateurishly

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[314] As quoted in Alice Jones-Miller, "Too Many Cookes?" *The Quill* (June 1981): 10.
[315] James Boylan, "The Ombudsman's Tale," *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1981): 28-31.
[316] Paul Blustein, "Some Journalists Fear Flashy Reporters Let Color Overwhelm Fact" *Wall Street Journal*, May 14, 1981.
[317] Interview with the *Saturday Evening Review* quoted in Blustein, ibid.

used," commented the Washington Star in an editorial. "One soon began to wonder whether the bright young reporter who wrote about City Hall like Tom Wolfe, or a political campaign like Hunter Thompson, really could get the routine facts off a police blotter."[318]

As diverse as these themes and arguments were, as consistent is their reference to New Journalism as a code word for all things narrative. The Janet Cooke scandal provided an occasion and served as a catalyst to discuss broader changes in journalism and their implications for the daily practice in newspapers. This debate illustrates conflicting ideas of what constituted narrative journalism, both in terms of its purpose and its practice. Territory was staked out, demarcated and defended and only in this process of boundary work did a clearer picture emerge or what was admissible. But, as one observer noticed, while this debate was fruitful in clarifying narrative techniques and their value in daily news reporting, there was also was a danger "that guilt by association would be invoked to undercut the long-standing struggle to make newspapers readable."[319] That the Cooke scandal posed a serious threat to the efforts of ASNE editors to improve the newspaper writing was illustrated in a follow-up piece to the scandal that also included a reference to another case of fabrication at the *New York Daily News*:

> The Washington and New York incidents have led some editors to reexamine the decade-long emphasis they have placed on "good writing." Eager to present lively articles that compete successfully with television for reader attention, many editors checked the clippings of job applicants with more of an eye for the well-turned phrase than the well-gathered fact.[320]

However, while debates after the scandal focused on the pitfalls of narrative journalism, some narrative journalists had been actively involved in efforts to explain and

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[318] "Editorial," *Washington Star*, April 21, 1981.
[319] Penn Kimball, "A Multiple Embarrassment," *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 1981): 34.
[320] Jonathan Friendly, "Disclosure of two fabricated articles causes papers to re-examine their rules," *New York Times*, May 25, 1981.

create awareness for their narrative approach to news. They were seizing opportunities to demonstrate how they were rethinking and reimagining daily reporting and writing techniques. And again it was ASNE again that provided a platform.

Cultivating Narrative Writing in Newspapers

In an effort to identify and reward excellent writing in newspapers, ASNE in 1978 began organizing annual contests to recognize the finest writing in American newspapers. It was an attempt to emphasize that there were already best practices and news writers that could serve as examples. The award committee consisted of editors from major newspapers and reflected geographic variety.[321] The award ceremony also became an integral part of ASNE's annual conventions. The prizes were awarded during the conference banquet and beginning in 1980, award winners were also invited to join a panel discussion and talk about their writing. The award-winning stories were published by the newly established Modern Media Institute (later Poynter Institute) as a series called "Best Newspaper Writing."[322] In the first few years, Roy Peter Clark edited the book, interviewed the reporters and provided notes and comments. It was in this context that Clark addressed criticism in wake of the Cooke scandal. In the introduction to the 1982 book he wrote, "In an era of Pulitzer hoaxes and recycled advice columns it needs to be said—though it should be obvious—that we do not stand for dishonest writing. Dishonest writing is bad writing, not matter how beautiful

[321] For instance, the first committee included editors from the following newspapers: *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, Knight-Ridder newspapers, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Boston Globe*, *New Britain (Conn.) Herald*, *Greenwood (Miss.) Commonwealth*, *Raleigh (N.C.) News and Observer*, *Anchorage Daily News*. Originally, there were four categories (news/deadline, news/non-deadline, features and commentary) but that changed throughout the years.

[322] The anthology was published from 1979 until 2008.

the style, for it perverts clear communication and violates the trust that bonds the writer and the reader.[323]

Clark took advantage of his official role as co-director of the Modern Media Institute and invoked the existence of a writing movement that stood "for clarity, relevance, humanity, hard work and the right work in the right place." Its proponents, he argued, "believe that strong reporting makes good writing possible."[324]

"Best Newspaper Writing," the annual anthologies of the writing contests, not only showcased the best writing in newspapers but also contained interviews with the award-winning journalists. Just like oral history interviews, these conversations capture the subjectivity of experiences as they not only describe what reporters did but also "what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they […] think they did."[325]
In the following I explore these interviews with respect to they way in which reporters talk about their practice of narrative techniques. This analysis demonstrates how reporters (and some editors) were trying to make sense of their routines and how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis traditional practices of straight news reporting. The purpose of these interviews was to talk about reporting and writing. In doing so, and especially when outlining practices of narrative reporting and writing, these journalists formed shared practices and a body of knowledge, illustrating an emerging framework of norms, values and beliefs with respect to narrative journalism. These conversations, then, illuminate how journalists were expanding the boundaries of daily journalism to include narrative techniques.

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[323] Roy Peter Clark, ed., *Best Newspaper Writing 1982,* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Modern Media Institute, 1982), xvi. He continued, "We do not stand for self-indulgent overwriting, deceptive leads, the enforcement of stereotypes or those techniques properly in the domain of fiction: composite characters, improved quotations, rearranged facts, invented authorial presence or the omniscient looking into minds." Ibid.
[324] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1982*, xvii.
[325] Portelli, "Peculiarities," 100.

From the perspective of writers and editors, narrative writing provided efficient tools to write about big events and trends (i.e. disasters, the "mood" in a particular community, events of national interest, foreign news) as well as personal, intimate experiences. Thomas Oliphant, who won the news/non-deadline category in 1979 with a story that reconstructed how the Boston area had been hit by a major blizzard, considered narrative is "best way to reconstruct major events." In his view, "newspapers don't do enough of it."[326] While Oliphant was specifically talking about narrative journalism, this label was not widely used by reporters and editors. Instead, individual newsrooms came up with their own names and called these stories that explored larger trends or specific contexts "a read" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), "sweep pieces" (*Los Angeles Herald Examiner*) or characterized their approach to in-depth, narrative stories as "more typical of a national magazine approach than a newspaper approach" (*Boston Globe*).[327]

Writers emphasized the importance of reporting but they also underscored that their reporting differed from standard news reporting. "It's the reporting that underlies the good writing," said Carol McCabe who won the award in the "news" category in 1980 for her environmental reporting. "You've got to have the basic facts to build on, and you work with language in a way that makes it not "fancier"—I like "plainer."[328] For Cynthia Gorney, then the West Coast reporter for the *Washington Post* Style section, reporting narrative stories often included "mucking around in people's tragedies" and the challenge was "not to go crazy with

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326 Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1979*, 118

327 Ibid.

328 Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1980*, 116. The introduction to her interview said: "Skillful journalists are experimenting with a type of reporting that goes well beyond the traditional "human interest" story. Some are calling it "people journalism," but it should not be confused with the journalism of gossip and glamor, practiced more and more to attract readers to newspapers. Reporters are centering their stories not only on the council meeting, the court decision or the administrative memo, but also on the people directly affected by public policy, the men and women and children who suffer from brad decisions regarding inflation, taxes or energy. No one practices the type of journalism with more skill and dedication than Carol McCabe […]." Ibid., 65.

grief but at the same time respond the way a human being ought to respond." She won the features award in 1980 for a series of stories, one of which was a profile of Sirhan Sirhan, the murderer of Robert F. Kennedy. When describing her reporting style, she also indicated that it sometimes clashed with traditional notions of journalistic detachment. "I cry a lot on stories. The first time it happened I thought, Now what kind of reporter are you? You're supposed to be tough and aloof."[329]

Several reporters mentioned that traditional fact gathering techniques would not be sufficient for narrative writing. "I've found that the most important aspect of a story like this is the questions you pose," said James Kindall of the *Kansas City Star*, award-winner for non-deadline writing in 1984. "You can try the who, what, when and how formula, but it doesn't engender the type of in-depth story you're trying to pursue."[330] Acknowledging the emotional content of newsgathering had specific consequences for writing such stories. "The whole idea is feeling with the protagonist or network of people in your story," said Joe Nawrozski of *The News American* in Baltimore. "It's OK to feel. If you don't feel, here comes the inverted pyramid again. […] I'm not ashamed to say that I feel some empathy with the people I write about."[331] This different way of reporting also posed some practical challenges for the journalistic self-image and required reporters to negotiate professional values such as objectivity. "I believe that there is not as much objectivity possible in journalism as some observers feel, because as long as you have human beings selecting facts that are used, it comes through a subjective mind," said McCabe of the *Providence Sunday Journal*. "A reporter

[329] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1980*, 61.
[330] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1984*, 100.
[331] Ibid., 238.

expressing his feelings should never replace the plain statement of fact, but I think we need people who will go and try to explain what is beyond those facts."[332]

This critical stance towards the notion of objectivity was reflected in various interviews. But far from embracing a self-centered and solipsistic perspective instead, many narrative writers indicated how making this subjective judgments necessarily implies uncertainty. As Saul Pett from the Associated Press explained his approach to "mood pieces"—stories that aim to capture a community's atmosphere, "It's unscientific. I don't attempt a poll or anything. I do talk to people. The man in the street. I also talk to people in a apposition to catch the mood in the community. Observers and people watchers." Pett won the 1981 award for non-deadline writing with a piece that reflected on the national mood by portraying Asheville, N.C. "How do I know I'm going to be accurate about suggesting a general mood?" he said. "Well, again, after a while you get a sameness. You begin to hear the same things over and over again. That's when you begin to get confident."[333] While acknowledging imperfection and ambivalence about personal judgments, narrative journalists expressed confidence about making those judgments. "In every story, there are certain conclusions that any prudent man could draw from a set of facts or observations," said William Blundell who later wrote the influential book *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing.*[334]

For many writers, narrative journalism provided a method to combine the emotional content of a story with the requirements for news and information. Many of them found inspiration in fiction writing and then adapted literary techniques for weaving news into the

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[332] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1980*, 118.
[333] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1981*, 30.
[334] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1980*, 37. William E. Blundell, *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing: Based on the Wall Street Journal Guide* (New York: New American Library, 1988). See also a comment by James Kindall: "Even people who reveal their motivation, it takes an analysis on your part whether that's true or not. That's the difficult part. You have to tie up everything in one large package and see what you have. That's always risky. I'm always queasy about it." Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1984*, 102.

narrative. Richard Zahler said that the "experience of literature" helped to find that balance between information and emotion. "I'm a strong believer in story telling as story telling," he said. "The thing has got to move and develop. It's got to have detail and real people and feeling and emotion.[335]

Many of the interviewed journalists expressed that the traditional formulas for news writing, such as the inverted pyramid, were only of limited use. The inverted pyramid is "an outline, it's easy to do, and in a lot of cases it fills the need," said Joe Nawrozski. "But if you have an opportunity to get deeper, to add some feeling to a breaking story, it's so much stronger. It's also much more informative and entertaining."[336]

The challenge, as many of the narrative journalists saw it, was finding the small story that illuminated the larger, the microcosm that encapsulated the macrocosm, the personal story that held universal appeal. "The goal is not to experience a particular session of the legislature or a particular house fire, but to find the things that really affect the world one way or another, things which make a difference, and try to come to some understanding of what is going on and try to explain it in a way that is accessible to people," said Peter Rinearson of the Seattle Times, who won an ASNE award for business writing and a Pulitzer for his story about the making of the Boeing 757.[337] "The hard thing is to take that one image or example and broaden it, to try to explain in a paragraph or two how this relates to the larger story," said David Zucchino, who won the award for deadline writing in 1984. "It helps if your example is dramatic, but you have to explain how these large, historical events

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[335] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1981*, 73-74. See also a comment by Carol McCabe: "I'm writing stories. I'm using them as characters in stories. They're telling their own stories. They come to life because they are alive, and I try to employ language skillfully so they are not just pieces of type. Most of us are into working with characters in the same way that fiction writers do." Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1980*, 115.
[336] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1984*, 238.
[337] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1984*, 215.

are focusing on one person or one place. You can broaden that into a way of showing what this is all about by giving some of the reasons, some of the causes, some of the effects."[338]

All taken together, evidence from these interviews suggests that journalists in the early 1980s actively redefined their practices for reporting and writing news stories. They promoted a form of journalism that, as they perceived it, was more assertive, more creative and more imaginative than traditional news reporting. At the same time, they emphasized the need for thorough reporting, distancing themselves from techniques that fictionalized true stories. "Best Newspaper Writing" became a reference book, a taxonomy of best practices, a tool to promote the growth of an interpretive community. Eventually, award-winning journalists published their own takes on narrative writing techniques, launching a cottage industry of books for narrative journalists.[339]

Conclusion

By the mid-1980s the tone of discussing good writing in newspapers had shifted. Examples of best practices and experiments in newsrooms across the country were routinely shared in newsletters.[340] Roy Peter Clark had developed a reputation as the "foremost expert"[341] in good newspaper writing and "the dean of writing coaches."[342] In 1983, David Laventhol, who served as the chairman of the ASNE award judges declared that the writing

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338 Ibid., 47.

339 E.g. Jon Franklin, *Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction by a Two-Time Pulitzer Prize-Winner* (New York: Athaneum, 1986); Blundell, *Art and Craft*.

340 In 1985, for example, *Editor's Exchange* featured initiatives in the following newsrooms: *Watertown (N.Y.) Daily Times*; *Lawrence (Mass.) Eagle-Tribune*; *Dallas Morning News*; *Milwaukee Journal*; *Shreveport (La.) Times*; *Detroit Free Press*; Salt Lake City's *Deseret News*. See *The Editors' Exchange* 8 no. 1 (January, 1985); *The Editors' Exchange* 8, no. 2, (February 1985); *The Editors' Exchange* 8 no. 6 (August 1985).

341 Arnold Rosenfeld from the Austin (Texas) American-Statesman said, "Dr. Clark has become perhaps the foremost expert on good, and, conversely, bad newspaper writing." American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1985 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors,* 1985, 213.

342 American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1987 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1987, 230. For a study about the impact of writing coaches see Ray Laakaniemi, "An Analysis of Writing Coach Programs on American Daily Newspapers," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 64, no. 2-3 (1985).

initiative is working. He said, "The range and breadth of good writing, from what we have seen on the judging committee, is nationwide; it's not confined to big newspapers or city newspapers or any region."[343] The Modern Media Institute became the Poynter Institute and systematically promoted the practice of narrative writing by offering weekly seminars and training materials. The question was no longer, "Do newspapers need narrative writing?" but "How can narrative writing be done in newspapers in the best possible way?"

This chapter traced the emergence of narrative journalism in American newspapers and analyzed its adoption by editors and reporters. It showed how individual efforts to develop narrative writing, i.e. at the *St. Petersburg Times* but also at other papers, coalesced with a coordinated initiative at ASNE to improve the writing in American newspapers. By focusing on writing improvement, ASNE as an organization provided resources, justification and incentives to editors and reporters to have discussions about writing in general and narrative writing in particular. Against the backdrop of stagnating circulations, technological innovation and cultural change, editors accepted (if not always embraced) the notion that writing and the spectrum of different writing styles required attention. Occasional scandals involving the excessive practice of literary license or fabrication (i.e. Janet Cooke) served as catalysts to discuss the merits and flaws of narrative techniques, demarcated the boundaries for their application in daily journalism and expelled practitioners or viewpoints that violated explicit or implicit rules of news journalism. Simultaneously, reporters and editors were actively forging a common understanding of best practices and developing values and norms for becoming an interpretive community of narrative journalists. As a consequence, the change in form facilitated and made necessary a change in practices. A narrative news logic emerged and took hold in daily newspaper production.

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[343] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1983 Convention, American Society of Newspaper Editors,* 1983.

This chapter captured a significant period in the evolution of narrative journalism in American newspapers and its findings highlight substantial implications for understanding broader changes towards interpretive journalism. Recent scholarship analyzing changes in the journalism industry shows a remarkable consensus in arguing that in response to an intensely competitive media environment and abundant sources of entertainment, news outlets increasingly relied on soft and sensationalist news content. While it is indisputable that the commercial pressure on media organizations and journalists has increased over the past decades, its impact on the actual form of journalism has not been so thoroughly investigated. My analysis does not refute the findings of political economists who studied commodification of news and the ideological consequences of a capitalistic market environment. Nevertheless, my findings suggest that despite increasing pressures to give in to business imperatives, newsroom of various sizes and across the country found ways to exert relative autonomy. Another implication of this chapter is that narrative journalism as such is not soft, sensationalist or superficial. When reporters and editors advocated for narrative strategies, they emphasized its qualities as analytical and interpretive tools to capture aspects of reality that traditional news journalism failed to grasp. At the same time, they anchored their narrative approaches in a culture of reporting, fact-checking and journalistic integrity.

By tracing and analyzing the evolution of narrative journalism this chapter contributed to previous research by scholars of literary journalism who have shown that narrative writing, despite its beginnings in the late 19th century, only gained significant momentum in the second half of the 20th century.[344] Yet, as this chapter focuses its analytical lens specifically on the daily news production in newspapers it offers a longitudinal study of

[344] See literature review on literary journalism.

the use of narrative in news reporting and thus contributes towards filling a gap in recent scholarship.[345] In addition, this chapter provides context and historical perspective to ongoing examinations of the "strategic ritual of emotionality" and subjectivity in news writing.[346] Finally, it adds texture to studies in American cultural history that investigate "a change in culture, a shift in what used to be called the "climate of opinion" or the "zeitgeist" or the "spirit of the times" between the 1960s and the 1980s.[347]

While this chapter largely emphasized boundary work within journalism as a significant factor in the evolution of narrative news writing, it subscribes to a conceptualization of journalism that views journalistic practice both as a response and as a mediator of social, economic, political and cultural forces. As Tim Vos argued when examining the history of American news writing, "All news forms […] were products of a nexus of inherited literary forms, the evolving purpose of the newspaper, past events, and circumstances and the spirit of the age."[348] Narrative journalism, too, was a product of inherited literary forms, the evolving purpose of the newspaper and a changing media landscape. Thus it is important to note that individual efforts to advance narrative journalism as a new and legitimate practice in daily newspaper journalism would have fallen flat had there not been a certain cultural momentum, a zeitgeist, that created opportunities for these efforts to take shape and expand.

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345 Kathy Roberts Forde, "Discovering the Explanatory Report," *Journalism Practice* 1, no. 2 (2007): 227-44.
346 Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Strategic Ritual of Emotionality: A Case Study of Pulitzer Prize-winning Articles," *Journalism* 14, no. 1 (2013); Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, "Subjectivity and Story-telling in Journalism: Examining Expressions of Affect, Judgment and Appreciation in Pulitzer Prize-winning Stories," *Journalism Studies* 14, no. 3 (2013). See Chapter VI.
347 Schudson, *Rise of the Right to Know, 16-17*.
348 Tim P. Vos, "News Writing Structure and Style," in *American Journalism: History, Principles, Practices*, eds. David W. Sloan, and Lisa Mullikin Parcell (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2002), 305.

CHAPTER VI

NARRATIVE MATURATION:

HOW A NATIONAL WRITING MOVEMENT COALESCED

By the late 1980s the writing in American newspapers had significantly improved. Moreover, two decades after the *Washington Post* Style section had pioneered the practice of narrative writing in the daily newspaper production, innovative storytelling had moved from the feature sections to all across the pages of the newspaper: columns, editorials, even the news. Many American newspapers had come a long way from shedding their gray and dreary writing routines. But producing more interesting, more readable content had little effect on the downward trend. There were fewer newspapers in 1989 than in the early 1970s (1,626 in 1989 compared to 1,748 in 1970). Total circulation for morning and evening newspapers had stagnated (62,649,218 vs. 62,107,527) while it had increased for Sunday newspapers (62,008,154 vs. 49,216,602). But even this significant increase could not make up for the relative loss of the daily newspaper audience. The percentage of newspaper readers had dropped from 78% to 64% during the week and from 72% to 67% on Sundays.[349]

Demographic trends as well as social and economic change also had an impact on the journalistic marketplace. Media consumers in the late 1980s were better educated but also under higher pressure to balance the constraints of work and the demands of family life. After women increasingly joined the workforce in the 1970s, two-earner couples had to navigate a highly differentiated marketplace for information and entertainment. None of these trends alone would explain lower readership but the implications for media consumers

[349] American Newspaper Publishers Association, *90 Facts About Newspapers*, April 1990.

were obvious: there were more entertainment options while leisure time over all did not expand, maybe even contracted.

Addressing the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1988, Leo Bogart, one of the industry's foremost researchers during that period, summed up the significant changes between 1983 and 1988, many of which had ramifications for the evolution of narrative writing in newsrooms. According to Bogart, the news hole in newspapers had grown significantly, leading to "more pages for editors to fill and more pages for readers to contend with." The trend "to package editorial matter in terms of clearly definable and identifiable sections" had continued. And overall, there was "more emphasis on features and entertainment relative to news information, and more emphasis on local as opposed to national and world news."[350] As a consequence, there was stiffer competition within newspapers as different sections were vying for their readers' attention.

The opportunities for narrative writing were manifold: Narrative pieces often served as section openers. With more sections to fill, there was plenty of space for these stories. More emphasis on features also meant more demand for narrative storytelling. Nevertheless, this trend also encouraged the creation of gimmicky fluff pieces. More interest in local stories opened opportunities for narrative journalists to profile people and their everyday lives. In fact, it was a major trend—for good and for ill—that newspapers moved away from chronicling the routines of institutions and instead focused on the experiences of ordinary people. In sum, narrative stories had the potential to meet the needs of a transformed marketplace while simultaneously also expanding the boundaries of what daily journalism could look like.

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[350] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1988 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 1988, 231.

This chapter maps narrative journalism's evolution in newspapers from around 1988 to 2001. First I will sketch the writing culture and how narrative journalism had found a place in mainstream newspaper journalism. In documenting debates among editors in writing committees at ASNE and the Associated Press Managing Editors (APME), I will also identify how this success of narrative journalism led to a diversification of the genre. While some newspapers associated narrative techniques with feature and lifestyle sections, others systematically implemented them in news sections. This schism, I argue, ultimately constituted one of the reasons that critics accused narrative journalism of being soft, conflating a variety of approaches into a single category. The next section of this chapter focuses on the *Oregonian* and its journey from a mediocre regional paper to an award-winning model for substantive and sophisticated storytelling. I will demonstrate how the *Oregonian* can be viewed as an exemplary case of adopting, promoting and perfecting narrative techniques, earning recognition from its readers and the newspaper industry at large. This episode will also show how the paper's trajectory was built on and intertwined with narrative journalism's expansion in the newspaper industry. The *Oregonian's* editors and reporters were able to draw from a rich infrastructure of expertise and a solid network of practitioners. Simultaneously the paper became an inspiring model for narrative journalists across the country. What this community of practice looked like will be the topic of the final section of this chapter. I will describe how conventions, conferences and workshops helped construct a common identity, fostered relationships between proponents of the genre, galvanized the imagination of young reporters, canonized theory and practice, and established narrative writing as an institutional fixture in American journalism.

Writing Culture in the 1990s

After about a decade of writing improvement efforts, writing culture in newsrooms was no longer an exotic topic of conversation but a regular feature in industry interactions. The ASNE *Bulletin* still reported about initiatives across the country but the tone had shifted. Instead of legitimizing the need for improving writing in newsrooms, the magazine routinely featured updates and best practices. The situation was similar at the *Editor & Publisher*. For example, the magazine carried columns of writing coaches and provided information about studies that examined the impact of writing styles in newspapers.[351] Moreover, there were writing committees both at the American Society of Newspaper Editors and at the Associated Press Managing Editors, all of which served as platforms to exchange ideas and facilitate conversations about what good writing was supposed to look like. Concerted efforts by the newspaper industry to study the routines, habits and desires had led to actual and widespread changes in the look and content of newspapers. Of particular importance were two reports by Ruth Clark, a consultant whose research was commissioned by the Readership Project, a consortium of various newspaper organizations, and widely distributed among editors. Her first report "Changing Needs of Changing Readers" from the late 1970s was described in 1987 as the "study that probably led to more changes at more newspapers than any other single factor in the last 15 years."[352] Based on focus groups in twelve American cities, the study advocated for news stories that spoke to the needs of readers for finding self-fulfillment and help for coping with their daily lives.[353] A follow-up study took a different turn and, citing evidence from surveys, called for less advice and more information.

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[351] Debra Gersh, "Inverted Pyramid Turned Upside Down," *Editor & Publisher*, May 1, 1993, 22.
[352] Susan Miller, "America's Dailies and the Drive to Capture Lost Readers" *Gannett Center Journal*, Spring 1987: 60.
[353] Jonah Sachs, *Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell—and Live—the Best Stories Will Rule the Future* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

Speaking at the ASNE convention in 1984, Clark reported that readers were demanding more hard news. The important point was that editors took these studies very seriously and adapted their findings to varying degrees in their newspapers. Moreover, this experimentation with different approaches to presenting daily news created opportunities to think about the role and function of the newspaper in multiple ways. As Susan Miller observed in 1987, "the 'back to hard news' trend reflects something more than a pendulum swing. The industry may have come full circle, but it has arrived at a place quite different from where it began."[354] As a consequence—I have described some of these dynamics in the preceding chapter—the boundaries between hard news and soft news became more fluid as reporters and editors became attuned to a wider variety of news stories cutting across the hard news-soft news dive (i.e. using a narrative approach to hard news or an explanatory approach to entertainment news).

Some of the biggest changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s were driven by business pressures and the growing corporatization of newsrooms. Following larger trends in the American economy, mergers and acquisitions also dominated the newspaper industry. Family-led papers were sold to chains and newspaper groups were bought by media conglomerates. As a result, editors were forced to think more like managers and MBAs began ruling the newsrooms.[355] Interestingly, as Doug Underwood argued in 1988, these developments led to diverging effects. On the one hand, marketing and strategic planning increased the pressure on editors to pander to the lowest common denominator and the needs of advertisers, leading to shallow and superficial fluff pieces. On the other hand, business constraints also increased the consciousness of editors to focus on substantial

[354] Miller, "America's Dailies," 64.
[355] Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom: How the Marketers and Managers are Reshaping Today's Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

quality improvement which meant "devoting more resources than ever to investigative teams and big, expensive projects designed to win prestigious prizes."[356] Moreover, emphasizing strategic goals and benchmarks on the business side of news production also lead to the tracking successes and failures. Newsroom managers had more data at their disposal to determine what kind of content worked and what did not.

All taken together, these larger trends of corporatization, fragmentation and differentiation led to a variety of editorial changes. A research study of the American Newspaper Publishers Association summarized how editors had "reacted to the whips of television and changing lifestyles. According to an APME survey, editors said they had: expanded sports packages; Added business coverage, often with special weekly sections; repackaged and redesigned their papers, especially Page 1; expanded their TV listings; added local and zoned news coverage; upgraded their opinion sections, feature sections and entertainment coverage.[357]

In light of these larger trends and their effects on newspapers, Jim Batten, the president of the Knight-Ridder chain, diagnosed specific challenges for quality journalism. "But as public issues become more complex," he wrote in the ASNE Bulletin in 1989, "as our private lives become ever busier, as our appetites for self-indulgence grow seemingly without limit, one wonders some days who really cares about the public's business. Who is willing to read about it, and act on what they read?"[358] He also argued that editors and reporters should give up the "all-too-common journalistic queasiness about entertaining

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[356] Doug Underwood, "When MBAs Rule the Newsroom," *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 1988), 23.
[357] American Newspaper Publishers Association, "Success Stories: What 28 Newspapers Are Doing to Gain and Retain Readers," 1988, 47
[358] James Batten, "Too Many Newspaper People Continue to Ignore Important Realities of Modern Life—and Modern Readers," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (May/June 1989): 18-21, 20

readers."[359] Informing readers was not enough any more, he argued. Instead, he called for newspapers "to be warm and caring and funny and insightful and human, not just honest and professional and informative. That subtracts nothing from their ability to tell hard truths. In fact, it improves the ability to tell hard truths—and have them accepted and believed."[360]

The way in which Batten reconceptualized the role of newspapers—warm, caring, funny, insightful, human—expressed a growing realization among editors and journalists that newspapers needed to open themselves to a wider spectrum of functions if they wanted to stay relevant. Moreover, Batten explicitly forged a connection between this evolving role of the newspaper and the industry's capability to sustain its credibility and legitimacy. These topics would preoccupy the newspaper industry throughout the 1990s. And they created fertile ground for narrative journalism's evolution in daily news production. People-centered writing was not necessarily narrative writing but, as the preceding chapter demonstrated, narrative writers described their approaches as efforts to illuminate the human dimension of news. In recent years, quantitative studies have demonstrated the expansion of interpretative and narrative writing[361] but there are also clear indicators that this shift was felt within the industry while it was unfolding. One illustrative example is the ASNE convention in 1990 when America's leading editors invited Tom Wolfe to speak at their gathering. Wolfe, who had famously berated mainstream newspapers for being deaf to the virtues of narrative journalism—and for journalists being "beige narrators"—detected a sea change in daily newspaper writing.

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[359] "Entertainment always has been part of the appeal of mass-circulation American newspapers. If we are too solemn or pretentious to accommodate that very human appetite, then our readers will be more likely to drift away. And they won't be around to be informed or educated or made indignant by stories that citizens of a democracy ought to know about." Ibid, 21.
[360] Batten, "Too Many Newspaper People," 21.
[361] See literature review.

> [N]ewspapers are beginning, quite instinctively and without necessarily any particular plan, to report theses things in a quite sociological or anthropological way, I notice on the front page of newspapers now, more and more, I see more and more pieces that are sociological or anthropological in nature. The changes in the way people live are now front page news. It is terrific, and since I am being didactic, I urge everybody to continue this.[362]

The ASNE awards remained an important venue for newspapers to showcase their best writing.[363] While award categories kept changing and did not privilege particular writing styles, a theme emerged from the discussions at ASNE conventions and in the ASNE Bulletin: award-winning writing was people-centered writing. Don Fry, Roy Peter Clark's successor in editing the Best Newspaper Writing anthologies, succinctly summarized this collective sentiment in 1991 article in the ASNE Bulletin. He wrote, "So, bright writing comes from bright sentences; bright characters; bright voices, including the bright author's voice; bright descriptions; and bright surprises. But who has time and space for all that shining on city hall or night cops or the school beat? You do. Any reporter does, who's willing to bring back people in the notebook and not just data. Writers win the bright prizes by writing about people.[364]

As narrative writing had made inroads in the daily newspaper production, it also diversified and found a home in different places. Since "narrative writing" was not a label that editors and reporters used in their conversations, narrative techniques could be found in feature sections as well as in regular news sections. This kind of schism led to different

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362 American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1990 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 205.

363 In an industry replete with award ceremonies, the ASNE awards held a particular position. As David von Drehle put it after winning an award in 1990, "This is a very valuable prize, the only major journalism prize that bases all its points on getting the words in the right order, and that means a lot to those of us who try." American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the 1990 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors,* 212.

364 "What Do You Mean, 'Make My Prose Brighter'? Distinguished Writing Award Winners Offer Six Examples of how to 'Brighten' Newswriting," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (October 1989), 15.

outcomes—with feature sections emphasizing the lifestyle character and news sections focusing on the documentary news writing.

After the *Washington Post* launched its Style section in 1969, lifestyle sections became an integral part of many American newspapers in the 1970s. During the 1980s, these sections took center stage and their expansion was mainly driven by business imperatives. "No longer relegated to the back benches of the newsroom or the distant recesses of the editor's mind," one editor noted in 1987, "feature sections today represent a pivotal tool in the growth of newspapers in their markets."[365] In light of fierce competition with television and magazines, feature sections were seen as the newspaper industry's response to the aforementioned demographic, economic and social changes. While the Style section pioneered the use of news features in lifestyle sections and emphasized storytelling, feature sections in the 1980s were largely designed to focus on service journalism and entertainment. As one features editor described the dual purpose of feature sections.

> By providing information that enhances the quality of our increasingly sophisticated readers' lives, critical assessments that help readers make intelligent choices on spending their money and time—consistently respected guides to the 'quality keys'—restaurant, film, theater, music, art, television, fashion, food, wine, etc. And by entertaining the reader, holding his attention, making the reader know that the section provides a kind of enjoyment that can be obtained nowhere else.[366]

However, editors were not following one particular formula but actively engaged in experimenting and trying to define the role of feature sections in various ways. In fact, newspapers offered a wide variety of potential approaches and editorial strategies. The cover of the APME Features Committee report in 1988 illustrates these competing pressures poignantly. A cartoon depicts the "feature creature," a six-headed monster that is chasing

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[365] Larry Beaupre, "Features Grow Up," *Report of the Features Committee*, APME 1987, 1.
[366] Pamela Bruger Scott: "'Lifestyle' Moves Form Coping to Quality," *Report of the Features Committee*, APME 1987, 2.

after an editor. Each of these heads is yelling specific instructions at the fleeing editor: "Appeal to everyone!; Appeal to women!; Lighter! Brighter!; Heavier! Deeper!; More soft news!; More hard news!" The cover illustrates the spectrum of opinions, expectations and business pressures. Depending on the actual example, feature sections could range from crude commercialism to sophisticated entertainment. They offered opportunities for substantial nonfiction writing but also propelled a certain predilection for fluff.[367] The APME report provides a suggestive snapshot of what editors considered to be a successful feature story. The committee had asked its members to submit examples of "best features ideas that could be adapted and immediately put to work by editors everywhere." The final list of suggestions illustrates the tension between light distraction and deep storytelling. I categorized these suggestions—relying on a simple definition of storytelling (a character encountering a complication that illustrates a larger theme)—and examined their potential for a narrative approach. Out of the "101 Best Feature Ideas" only ten showed clear signs of storytelling. A clear indication that "feature" does not always equal "narrative." Some of those employed the strategy of following one character over a specific period (i.e. a teacher's first week at school, an academic year in the life of a drama student, a year in middle school told through he eyes of a child) while others recommended a quasi-sociological or quasi-ethnographic look at particular groups or communities (i.e. an "in-depth look at the American family of 1988," "anatomy of a community theater group" or "Scout group or Little League Team"). One idea called for profiles of people in their work environment, "ordinary people who might not otherwise get into the paper." Two suggestions

[367] This was even more visible in the mid-1990s: "A lot of features sections are getting very fluffy and overdesigned," said [one editor]. "They have a lot of graphics and not always a lot of content. They look great but there's no depth." As quoted in Susan Love, "From 'Women's Pages' to 'Style Sections' to—What? Feature Editors Wrestle over the Best Way to Gather Wandering Readers" *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (February 1995), 5.

demonstrated the quintessential narrative approach of telling small stories that illuminated larger issues. In one of those, the *St. Petersburg Times* showed the example of a story that reconstructed how a man killed his wife and then himself one day after his 70th birthday. "The key here," the editor wrote, "is to find such an event in which the participants had friends and family close enough to the situation to tell what happened and who are willing to be interviewed." The other example came from the *News and Observer* and *The Raleigh Times* and reconstructed the life of a homeless man who had frozen to death. "The reporter went beyond the surface to find out who this man really was and what led to his death," editor Marion Gregory wrote. " It showed the personal side of a man who otherwise was just a statistic."

The overwhelming majority of these feature ideas, 91 out of 101, focused on themes such as travel, home design, fashion, real estate, the arts and (local) celebrities. Many suggestions offered some kind of service journalism (i.e., finding support groups in the community, choosing the right diet, ranking of grocery stores). Several editors suggested story ideas for year-enders that recapped events in the community or larger trend in society ("Fads and fancies of the year"). Seeking active engagement from the readers was often encouraged through contests. One example by the *Times Herald Record* in Middletown, N.Y.: "'Pets are wonderful' was the theme of a contest which drew more than 300 entries from children under 10, senior citizens in their 80s, and everyone in between."

Obviously this brief example cannot claim any generalizable significance but it illustrates the wide spectrum of ideas for what editors considered to be a successful feature section. There was no industry-wide standard for these sections other than offering some kind of mix between information and entertainment. Occasionally, narrative storytelling sneaked into the mix but overall, the feature sections focused largely on lifestyle issues.

Narrative storytelling, as pioneered by the *Washington Post* Style section, moved away from the feature sections and instead expanded in the news sections.

In 1988, while the APME features committee was soliciting the best ideas for feature sections, the APME Writing and Editing Committee took an in-depth look at six newsrooms that were deemed positive examples of well-written papers to determine "how good writing is achieved." Members of the committee went to the *Concord Monitor*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Sacramento Bee*, the *Lexington Clarion-Leader*, the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* and the *Herald* in Everett, Washington. Summarizing the results in the introduction to the report, Reid MacCluggage concluded, "that good writing more often takes place in newsrooms: Where the atmosphere is relaxed. Where there is a collaborative effort between editors and reporters. And where there is risk-taking without penalties for failure."[368] This report, however, is more than an indicator of how newsrooms implemented strategies for writing improvement. It also encapsulates what leading editors on the committee considered as best practices in the industry and how these practices had taken shape in the respective newsrooms. In particular this report highlights how thoroughly narrative writing had taken roots in newsrooms across the country.

These examples, then, offer illuminating insights into the motivations and the thinking of editors and journalists as they were strategically adopting narrative techniques in the daily newspaper production. They also demonstrate that the implementation of narrative writing required both a consistent editorial philosophy and resources to sustain these efforts. Out of the six papers, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was probably the most obvious example for a

[368] 1988 APME Writing and Editing Committee Report, ECP.

respected writer's paper. It had been featured numerous times in the *Bulletin*.[369] When Eugene L. Roberts became executive editor in the mid-1970s he told his editors to encourage good writing. Editors and reporters explained their formula in the following way: The *Inquirer* hired writers based on impressive clips, puts good writing on Page one, did not have writing coaches but "encouraged its editors to push their writers to try something different," held informal writing workshops, encouraged staff to attend industry workshops, and fostered positive attitude among editors and writers. Narrative writing was an important element of the *Inquirer's* appeal. "As the distance from hard news increases, Inquirer writing styles become more varied, and what might be called 'literary' devices are frequently used to good effect."[370]

At the *Sacramento Bee*, executive editor Gregory Favre was the driving force behind emphasizing the importance of storytelling. Similar to the *Inquirer*, the front page was opened to narrative stories if the writing was compelling. The APME report quoted one assignment editor explaining, "Basically I tell reporters to tell me a story, spin me a tale, paint me a portrait. If you've got people, color, pathos, then that's a story that's going to compel people to read it. That's how a B-3 story becomes Page One."[371]

The *Concord Monitor* followed a full-fledged strategy to break with news-writing conventions such as the inverted pyramid. "We push writers to be interpretive," said editor

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[369] For example, in October 1979 the *Bulletin* gave ample space to Steven Lovelady, then the associate editor of the Inquirer, to deconstruct the story structure and especially the lede of an award-winning story about the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster. "It is not enough that the story was well-reported (and this story was superbly reported, chockfull of facts and revelations that are to this day still trickling out of congressional committees and federal investigations). The story worked, for all its vast size and encyclopedic detail, because it read well; people literally couldn't put it down—fast—if the lede that carried them into those eight open jump paged hadn't been compelling. So it's worth studying that lede—dissecting it—to see why it worked. Nobody expects to find a book, or a book-length article, in his friendly morning newspaper. So when you offer one, it had better be so compellingly written that it overcomes the inherent resistance of the reader. This one was." Steven Lovelady, "How this Lede Worked," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* 627 (October 1995), 4.

[370] 1988 APME Writing and Editing Committee Report, 25.

[371] Ibid., 30.

Mike Pride. "Not advocacy, but being a synthesizer, using powers of observation, and bringing the past to bear. We encourage a narrative style."[372] The report also included Pride's recommendations to young reporters who wanted to develop narrative writing skills. Among other writers such as John McPhee and Anthony Lukas, Pride mentioned Wolfe's "Introduction to the New Journalism" and wrote, "Some of it is donkey-poo, but it is a good discussion of making a picture of the whole by describing in detail the parts. (What Wolfe calls status detail.)"[373]

Allocating specific resources was a crucial component in all six newsrooms. At the *Lexington Herald-Leader* editors organized brown bag lunches and encouraged formats that facilitated discussions between editors and writers. At the *Inquirer*, the formula included hiring promising writers, pushing well-written stories on page one (independently from the topic area), writing workshop in-house and at industry events and a newsroom climate that actively rewarded outstanding writing. The *Sacramento Bee* followed a similar strategy. Initiated by Favre, commitment to good writing: "by recruiting dozens of reporters with strong writing skills; by undertaking ambitious special projects that free reporters for extensive research and writing; by keeping editors closely involved with reporters' projects by letting reporters' writing styles emerge without undue restraint."[374] For smaller papers like the *Herald* (Everett, Washington) and the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal the input of writing coaches was particularly important. At the Herald, management spent $4,000, roughly the newsroom's training budget, to bring Poynter writing coach Don Fry to Everett. As a result, the lifestyle section won four consecutive first-, second- or third-place prizes in the Penney-Missouri Newspaper Awards. The *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* also credited

[372] Ibid., 5.
[373] 1988 APME Writing and Editing Committee Report, 7.
[374] Ibid., 31.

Fry for improving the writing at the paper. "The seminars and writing coaches have been a source of great pride for the paper," said one editor. "Reporters and editors listen to the 'experts,' then use what they have learned." One reporter was quoted saying, "After Don Fry was here we put out some of our best papers."[375]

These experiences and how they were showcased in the APME report suggest some general observations about the state of narrative writing anno 1988. Narrative journalism was actively practiced and promoted in newspapers of different sizes. Editors and journalists were drawing from classic examples of the New Journalism but adapted it to the specific context of a daily newspaper. The adoption of narrative writing was driven by an editorial philosophy that formulated a vision, provided resources and offered incentives. Editors and reporters explained narrative writing as an approach to connect with readers and offer them compelling storytelling. Capacity-building within newsrooms took many forms: sometimes editors served as mentors, other times writing coaches brought expertise from outside. To examine these changes in more granular detail, I will now turn to the *Oregonian* and analyze how it became an exemplary case for adopting narrative journalism into daily newspaper routines.

The Oregonian

Within one year after Sandra Mims Rowe had taken over as editor of the *Oregonian*, the newspaper of record in Portland, Oregon in 1993, the reviews of her tenure were already glowing. An article in the *American Journalism Review* applauded how she had accomplished "the most sweeping changes an American daily ever made over such a short time."[376] In the following years she would transform the *Oregonian* from a sleepy regional newspaper to one

[375] Ibid., 29.
[376] Linda Fibich, "A Brand New Ballgame," *American Journalism Review* 16, no. 9 (November 1994): 28.

of the best newspapers in the country. An important part of that success derived from adopting and sustaining narrative journalism, the contours of which were developed by Jack Hart, a senior editor who eventually became writing coach and one of three managing editors.

The *Oregonian* was owned by the Newhouse family and their company Advance Publications since 1950. While critics looked down at the newspaper in the Newhouses' media empire for being "cash cows" and "old gray hulks of mediocrity," the paper in Portland was described as a solid newspaper with "occasional moments of excellence."[377] Then, in the early 1990s industry observers noted a marked change in how Donald Newhouse managed the newspaper chain. He served as chairman of the Newspaper Association of America and was elected to The Associated Press board of directors, taking on a more public role. Breaking with tradition, he also hired accomplished editors from outside the company. By the year 2000, "the Newhouse Way ha[d] cachet," wrote the *Columbia Journalism Review*. These are editors with reputations for excellence, and, given the freedom and support, they can be expected to create great newspapers."[378]

Sandy Rowe came from a newspaper family. Her father edited a small-town paper in Harrisonburg, Virginia. After attending East Carolina University, she found a job at a Norfolk radio station and then moved on to The Ledger-Star, the city's afternoon paper. Later the company merged with the Virginian-Pilot. Rowe was mainly doing news features. "I can't remember a time as an editor of the *Pilot* or the *Oregonian* that wasn't important to

[377] Thomas Maier, *Newhouse: All the Glitter, Power, and Glory of America's Richest Media Empire and the Secretive Man Behind It* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 354-355; 358.
[378] "The Newhouse Way," *Columbia Journalism Review* (January/February 2000): 24.

me," she recalled later.[379] In 1983 she became executive editor of the newspaper and two years later the *Virginian-Pilot* won a Pulitzer Prize for general-news reporting.[380]

Before Rowe became editor, the *Oregonian's* reputation was that of a mediocre newspaper. In her view, looking back at it from the perspective of more than twenty years later, the paper was "satisfactory" at best.[381] When Jim Camin, assistant managing editor for news reported the results from a feedback round at the American Press Institute in early 1990 he wrote that several editors "thought the paper too somber throughout" and commented on not enough features, especially local ones. He mentioned that the critics praised one of the writing samples and "called it compelling, well-written, informative. But they characterized everyday staff stories as 'not exceptional.'" Overall, these editors described the *Oregonian* as "solid, organized, well-rounded" but also "lack[ing] a personality."[382]

As editor of the Sunday magazine during the 1980s, Jack Hart had been doing some training for staffers of the *Oregonian*. He shared the sentiment that the *Oregonian* could be a better newspaper and do more with its resources. The paper, he said, "was big, lumbering and largely inconsequential. It was a sleepy institution with a lot of died-in-the-wool newsroom politics."[383] Before joining the *Oregonian*, Hart had earned a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Wisconsin and taught at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism. After deciding that he needed more practical experience, he went on a sabbatical and tested out working as a reporter, first for general assignments then for the arts and leisure section. When he was offered to take over the Sunday magazine—"a sleepy,

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[379] Sandra Mims Rowe, interview with the author, February 9, 2017.
[380] "Sandra Mims Rowe: She Just Wins," *Columbia Journalism Review* (November/December 2001).
[381] Sandra Mims Rowe, interview with the author.
[382] Jim Camin, "How The Oregonian Stacked Up at API," *Second Takes* 1, no. 11 (March 1990): 5.
[383] Jack Hart, interview with the author, October 18, 2016.

dusty corner of the operation without a sense for magazine"[384]—he seized the opportunity and gave up his tenured position at the university. Under his leadership the magazine thrived, became a regional (not just statewide) canvas and won prizes. In 1989 he became the *Oregonian's* writing coach and started the monthly newsletter *Second Takes* which was meant as training tool and platform for editorial discussions.[385]

In the first issue, echoing the conversations of editors in the 1980s, Hart outlined the need for improving the newspaper against the backdrop of relative decline in newspaper circulation and the competition with other media for the time of readers. He also stated key principles that should guide the paper's effort in improving writing. "The first principle of communicating with words, pictures or graphics is simple clarity," he wrote, building on traditional values of newspaper leadership. Another principle, however, pointed into the direction of expanding core assumptions of what a newspaper should stand for. He wrote, "A newspaper's first duty is to inform but it also should stimulate readers, move them emotionally and call them to action."[386] This constitutes a significant departure from newspaper orthodoxy and positioned the *Oregonian* along other newspapers across the country that promoted a more interpretive, analytical and also narrative approach to the news.

Introducing the idea of narrative writing in a traditional newsroom such as the *Oregonian's* was a gradual process. The first explicit reference to narrative writing was in the fifth issue of *Second Takes*. Hart deplored that while there was a larger trend towards thinking

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[384] Ibid.

[385] The following analysis is in large part based on the writings in *Second Takes*. The eight-page newsletter was published monthly between 1989 and 2001. While Jack Hart did most of the writing, there were also many other contributors from inside and outside the paper. In addition to being a training tool and debate platform, this newsletter can also be understood as a rhetorical device. Hart, in his role as editor in charge of staff improvement, used the newsletter to persuade reporters and editors of specific goals, strategies and writing philosophies. As such, the newsletter gives insights into the newsroom culture reflects the *Oregonian*'s evolution between 1989 and 2001.

[386] *Second Takes* 1, no. 1 (May 1989): 1.

about newspapers as daily magazines, only few reporters had the skills to exploit these techniques in newspaper features.

> Not everyone's a raconteur, of course. And anybody, who's ever attended amateur night in a comedy club knows that only a few rare talents can keep an audience laughing with a line of anecdotal platter. At some point skill with storytelling surpassed ordinary ability and enters an unfathomable realm we call art. Nonetheless, most of us can manage a successful around-the-water-cooler joke. And if we think about it, we also can isolate some simple rules of telling anecdotes that work.[387]

In one article, he wrote about the voice of the newspaper. After citing some examples from then-recent metro stories he asserted that "most readers will conclude that our paper is stuffy, long-winded, formal, cold and distant."[388] In another article, he shared some thoughts from participants of a workshop at the Poynter Institute. One of those read, "Expand the definition of what's news: Become storytellers. Think about narrative form; think about second-person."[389] In this early phase, though, the main emphasis was on achieving clarity. After conducting a readability analysis of the paper, Hart made the point that "we all need to understand that while readable writing may be simple, it isn't necessarily simplistic." He also stressed that some of the paper's best writers were great storytellers because they placed value on clear, concise expression.[390]

One year after the writing improvement program had started, Hart summed up the training and coaching activities at the paper: The senior editors did daily critiques of the newspaper and the writing coach had become a permanent position. Examples of good writing were featured in the newsletter, a bulletin board and in group discussions. Reporters

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[387] *Second Takes* 1, no. 5 (September 1989): 4.
[388] *Second Takes* 1, no. 9 (January 1990): 3. He continued, "That's not the sort of companion most of us would want to take along for a relaxing spell in an easy chair. It's not the kind of personality likely to attract the young readers we urgently need. And it's not the style that suits the informal ways typical of life here in the Pacific Northwest." Ibid.
[389] Ibid., 6.
[390] *Second Takes* 1, no. 10 (February 1990): 1; 8.

had one-on-one sessions with the writing coach and completed weekly consultations, readings and exercised. An internal library provided books and manuscripts on good writing. And the paper had brought in writing coach Paula LaRocque to critique the paper, teach a session on storytelling techniques and have conversations with reporters and editors. "The general impression is that our writing is clearer and clearer," Hart wrote. "The language is less dense, and *The Oregonian* sounds less forbidding."[391] One particular achievement that Hart highlighted was the use of leads that differed from the habitual reliance on the inverted pyramid style. "A quick scan of the local news columns suggests that we're being far more imaginative these days. When appropriate, we create leads by turning to anecdotes, scene-setters, wordplay, metaphor, vignettes and even more original ways of getting into stories."[392] He mentioned that while previously one out of five local stories began with non-traditional leads, currently that ration was one out of three.

Hart was tuned into the writing coach movement. The role of the writing coach had significantly gained in importance ever since the early efforts of Roy Peter Clark at the *St. Petersburg Times* and of Don Murray at the *Boston Globe* in the late 1970s. And the number of writing coaches had risen, too. After the first writers' coach workshop at the Poynter Institute in 1985, a group of participants wanted to continue the conversation through a quarterly newsletter. The first issue of the *Coaches' Corner* was published in the same year and two years later, the mailing list had grown from 35 to more than 80 coaches. Printing and distribution were paid by Poynter. The newsletter, too, served as a platform to build and sustain a network of dedicated writing experts in the world of newspapers.[393] Hart drew frequently from this community to fill the pages of *Second Takes*. The newsletter reprinted

[391] *Second Takes* 2, no. 2 (June 1990): 1.
[392] Ibid., 5.
[393] Report by the APME Writing and Editing Committee, 1987, ECB

columns from writing coaches, cited examples of activities in other newsrooms and provided hands-on examples for improving writing.

Out of all these activities evolved a more pronounced strategy to discuss and promote narrative writing at the newspaper. This next phase of the writing improvement program focused on educating reporters and editors about narrative writing more specifically. In an article titled "Missed Opportunities: Finding Stories Behind the News" Hart acknowledged that by publishing a newspaper "our first public obligation is a full and fair accounting of the day's news." Yet, he asserted, there were other obligations, too. "A newspaper links readers and the rest of humanity, helping to make life meaningful by exploring the nuances of the human condition. When it does that, news writing serves the same purpose as literature. The great novels earned their status as classics because they used sophisticated story forms to reveal central truths about the human experience."[394] And Hart offers a simple template to illustrate his understanding of what constituted true storytelling in the newspaper: "a good story will—at the least—display these minimum characteristics: (1) an interesting central character who (2) faces a challenge or is caught up in a conflict and whose (3) situation changes as (4) action takes place in (5) an engaging setting." It is important to underscore that Hart was actively trying to change the traditional newspaper routines when he began introducing a systematic approach to identifying and writing narrative stories in the constraints of daily newspaper production. The way in which he makes his argument shows that it was by no means obvious to editors and reporters that some stories differed from the inverted pyramid formula and thus required a different reporting and writing approach.

[394] *Second Takes* 2, no. 4 (August 1990): 1.

Hart's most systematic effort in laying out the idea and importance of storytelling in the daily newspaper appeared in August 1991. Prefacing his quasi-manifesto that "the story lies somewhere in the roots of our humanity" Hart states that storytelling was being rediscovered by newspapers. He detected a "nationwide movement to bring back the old way" of storytelling and makes references to "writing gurus" such as Jon Franklin and Bill Blundell as well as to training efforts at the Poynter Institute, the American Press Institute and at newsrooms across the country. In fact, he was situating his own efforts in a larger ecosystem of narrative writing proponents. Hart was also keen to link the qualities of storytelling to a business rationale. "The idea behind all this is that tried-and-true story forms will help newspapers compete with other media. That kind of more effective competition, runs the argument, may help boost circulation."[395] Nevertheless Hart was aware that introducing storytelling in a newsroom setting would face obstacles. "Literary-style storytelling isn't always well-received in a newsroom."[396] Hart also noted that storytelling was not part of newsroom lore, not taught in journalism schools and not discussed in standard newswriting texts.

After the arrival of Sandy Rowe, narrative writing received the full editorial support of the newsroom leadership. Rowe also brought a particular vision to the newspaper. She wanted to kindle a "fundamental rethinking of what our obligation is to our reader, and how we can best fulfill it."[397] Her core convictions were that the paper needed more emotion and more human touch. Jack Hart blended these ideas with his promotion of narrative writing.

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[395] *Second Takes* 3, no. 4 (August 1991): 3.
[396] Ibid., 8. "For one thing, experienced journalists sometimes reject the literary approach because it lacks an obvious news hook. Good stories may be about nobodies, at least in the sense that their principal players hold no public offices, have nothing to do with public policy issues and haven't been near the center of any major news events. Good stories also are timeless, and so they may lack the immediacy that conforms to the conventional definition of news. And because they teach broad truths, true stories seldom display the news-you-can-use practicality of more conventional lifestyle features."
[397] Fibich, "Brand New Ballgame," 28.

And this emphasis on storytelling was further underscored after Rowe hired Jacqui Banaszynski, who had won a Pulitzer Prize in feature writing in 1984, as senior editor in 1994. In retrospect, Rowe underscored the importance of having Hart and Banaszynski define the narrative mission of the paper. "These were two people," she said, "who knew how to teach, who knew how to coach. Reporters who had those instincts [for narrative storytelling] were drawn to them. I consider what I did setting the stage and making it clear what kind of newspaper we wanted to be back in the 90s and creating the culture in which we could do that."[398]

One of Rowe's first directives was to get more profiles into the paper. As Hart saw it, "instead of boring readers with dry facts about government process, we should strive to show them how events and issues play out in the lives of real people. That approach makes news meaningful. It exploits the natural human interest in seeing how other human beings organize their lives and cope with life's challenges."[399] He encouraged reporters to approach a profile by identifying a "strong central idea that acts as an overall organizing principle" for understanding a particular person. Finding this focus or theme, he argued, was "a professional judgment that goes way beyond the traditional idea of objective reporting."[400]

In another issue of Second Takes, Hart communicated and explained how and why Rowe wanted to see more emotion in the paper. "She wants readers to *feel* the life of their community in their newspaper," he wrote. "She wants the paper to deliver the same laughter, anger, sorrow and excitement that packs folks in the movie theaters, rivets them to the tube and sells slick magazines by the millions." Hart acknowledged that "most of us have to work

[398] Rowe, interview with the authof.
[399] *Second Takes* 5, no. 5 (September 1993): 1.
[400] *Second Takes* 5, no. 5 (September 1993): 4.

a lot harder at capturing the humanity that's missing in the typical news story."[401] In order to find and write more emotional stories, Hart encouraged reporters to look out of sympathetic characters being involved in emotional situations and then gather as much sensory detail as possible to make the reader feel the emotion. Hart contrasted two ways of reporting. He called the first "the scientific method, the European way of mastering man and nature." As journalists, he wrote, we "have been taught to obscure the raw world and immediately abstract general principles. We work inductively, transforming the specific details into conclusions that can be widely applied. When we leave a scene, we remember the conclusions, not the details that led us to them." In contrast, being an emotion-generating writer would mean to feel emotion him or herself. When encountering an emotional story or witnessing a situation that was wrought with emotion, Hart urged reporters to acknowledge these instances that elicit a personal emotional reaction and then go to the newsroom and put these feelings into words.

One example of what the newspaper considered to be a perfect case of this kind of approach was a story by Erin Hoover that appeared on April 30, 1994. Hart wrote that this story "on a Northeast Portland shooting drew enthusiastic praise in the morning critique because it represented such an original and emotionally compelling approach to the kind of tragedy that can become numbingly routine."[402] The story began:

> Nathan stands alone near the yellow police tape, his hands shoved into the pockets of his black Raiders jacket, hood pulled over his short braids. The 17-year old stares at the body.
> It is a young man he knew. Not very well. But well enough.

Hoover wrote that the victim was gunned down while riding his bike and noted that the police did not know why it happened. Then she described various bystanders at the

[401] *Second Takes* 5, no. 6 (October 1993): 1.
[402] *Second Takes* 6, no. 2 (June 1994): 1.

scene, offering brief sketches of their backgrounds, how they knew the victim and how they felt about the systemic violence in their neighborhood. At the end, she circled back to Nathan as he "stands alone trying to understand."

> He talks with determination about his own life. He says he's stayed close to God, but many of the boys he grew up with have gone astray. He says he dropped out of school but now plans to go to Portland Community College for his general Educational Development certificate and then major in interior design.
> He wishes he could change his world.
> "I want us to wake up," he said, looking at Taylor's body. "How many more black people have to get killed."

Excerpts of the story were reprinted in an issue of Second Takes accompanied by a personal essay of Hoover in which she described how she had approached the story. As Hart wrote in a preface to the essay, "Erin's story was particularly significant because it demonstrated how the techniques Sandy is encouraging can be learned and applied. Erin's inspiration came from a [writing coach] Chip Scanlan workshop that had taken place less than a week before."[403] The workshop was titled "Storytelling on Deadline" and echoed one of the strategic goals in the newsroom. Rowe said that she always wanted more storytelling on a daily basis because it would make "most impact with our readers." She also acknowledged that "it's hard to do it's hard to pull off even with the cast of talent that we had. I was never satisfied with the frequency with which we did it."[404]

1996 marked the beginning of the third phase of narrative journalism's expansion at the *Oregonian*. For the first time, one of the paper's writer's was included in the Best Newspaper Writing anthology.[405] Within the next few years, reporters would win Pulitzer awards and many other accolades in the industry, cementing the *Oregonian*'s reputation as a

[403] *Second Takes* 6, no. 2 (June 1994): 1.
[404] Rowe, interview with the author.
[405] Tom Hallman's story "Life of a Salesman" was a finalist in the non-deadline category.

writer's paper. At the beginning of this third phase, Hart reviewed the papers' efforts for writing improvement and detected a positive impact on the business side.

> We at the Oregonian pay more attention to the ways we craft and present words than most newspapers. We attend workshops and seminars. We have, over the past decade, invited every major American newspaper writing guru to critique and to instruct us. We hold classes and conduct discussion groups. And our steadily improving skill with language no doubt in some part accounts for the fact that our circulation is growing and our newsroom is expanding.[406]

He also connected the paper's activities to other initiatives in the industry, noting the importance of ASNE's annual writing contest, the crucial role of Poynter in advancing writing training and the newly established National Writers Workshops (see below). In the subsequent newsletter Hart emphasized that a culture of learning was essential for surviving in a competitive media world. "In these threatening times," he wrote, "newspaper journalism will have to adapt or surrender its place as society's dominant news medium. That means shedding the most outdated parts of our old culture and adopting a new culture better suited to our times."[407] And competition with broadcasters and online media became a permanent concern in the late 1990s.

Narrative journalism was part of the strategy to offer a different take on daily events. In one article, Hart explained that a particular kind of narrative background story was an effective tool to differentiate the paper's coverage from spot news. The tick-tock story was defined as "the detailed, behind-the-scenes explanation of the circumstances that produced the breaking news." Hart argued that "[a]s long as we have a monopoly on depth in a hurry, we'll have an eager audience."[408]

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406 *Second Takes* 8, no. 7 (November 1996): 1.
407 *Second Takes* 8, no. 8 (December 1996): 1.
408 *Second Takes* 8, no. 12 (April 1997): 1.

Another important development was that narrative was not limited to specialists. Reporters on different teams experimented with narrative techniques when the occasion arose, and often times they were surprised by the results. Jeff Mapes, a political reporter, documented the first year in office of Senator Gordon Smith. Looking back on this experience he wrote "I didn't realize it at the time, but I was entering the world of narrative nonfiction."[409] He acknowledged certain challenges of using narrative techniques for political profiles. Some readers, he reported, thought that the series of articles was too soft on the Senator and came off as propaganda. Nevertheless, he embraced the experience and concluded that he "came away convinced that narrative nonfiction is something that people like me—i.e., beat reporters in the daily reporting trenches—can do more often."[410]

The pitfalls of improperly using narrative techniques became an issue at the *Oregonian* when a number of scandals rocked the news industry in 1998. Stephen Glass, a staff writer for *The New Republic*, was caught fabricating parts or all of 27 of 41 articles. Patricia Smith, a columnist for the Boston Globe and a Pulitzer Prize finalist, had to resign from the paper after editors discovered that she had invented people and quotations in four of her metro columns.[411] These and other scandals (which were not necessarily related to narrative journalism) triggered an internal discussion about the ethics of literary journalism. After more than 60 reporters and editors, including Sandy Rowe and her leadership, gathered for a meeting in June 1998, the newsroom acknowledged that narrative writing raised special ethical concerns. As a result, writers and editors with a special interest in narrative formulated observations and suggestions for dealing with the ethics of narrative. It is worth

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[409] *Second Takes* 9, no. 9 (January 1998): 1.
[410] *Second Takes* 9, no. 9 (January 1998): 2.
[411] Robin Pogrebin, "Boston Columnist Is Ousted For Fabricated Articles," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1998. http://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/19/us/boston-columnist-is-ousted-for-fabricated-articles.html

presenting their findings in detail here as they speak to the specific challenges of making narrative journalism work in the setting of a daily newspaper.

> 1. Choosing to tell a story in narrative form ups the ethical ante. […] Because narrative involves huge numbers of subtle and sophisticated choices, it's easy to slip into dangerous ethical territory. And it's easy to hide ethical lapses.
> 2. The ethical differences among narrative nonfiction and more traditional news forms are differences in degree, rather than in kind.
> 3. Narrative should be a means to an end, not an end in itself.
> 4. Scenic reconstruction poses special dangers.
> 5. Telling details are key to narrative storytelling, but they invite stereotyping.
> 6. Narrative storytellers have an obligation to understand the world from the viewpoint of their subjects.
> 7. Internal monologue is a minefield.
> 8. Indirect characterization is more credible than direct characterization.
> 9. Ultimately, we should follow the same reporting standards, regardless of the form the story takes.[412]

At the *Oregonian* and elsewhere, the focus on emotional storytelling eventually also led to some push-back and second-guessing. In 1998, one article in *Second Takes* cited Barbara King, director of editorial training at The Associated Press: "What began as a good idea for humanizing stories has often become its own cliché. So, let's use the writing device, but let's keep using it more carefully and more deliberately by making the people we use more integral to our story."[413] As a result, Hart calibrated the call for putting people in stories listed good reasons for doing so: "It's absolutely essential that we humanize our stories; Cultural diversity. We need it on every level and from every corner; To bring in different points of view; To bring color into our stories, particularly with quotes, and in

[412] *Second Takes* 11, no. 2 (July 1998). For no. 6 see also: "However, [one participant] voiced caution about surrendering the narrative to the character's viewpoint. "You have to be fair to your readers, too," he said. If the wrier allows sources to sanitize the material excessively, "you end up with a dry story and a false impression."
[413] *Second Takes* 9, no. 10 (February 1998): 5.

speech patterns; Because our best stories show, instead of tell; To increase readability; As an opportunity to develop our writing skills."[414]

Despite these setbacks and challenges to narrative writing, the *Oregonian's* efforts in improving the paper in general and the writing in particular came to fruition when Rich Read won the newspaper's first Pulitzer in 42 years. His award-winning story analyzed the economic crisis in Asia by tracing the production of French fries from the Pacific Northwest to Southeast Asia. One year later, the *Oregonian* won the Gold medal for an investigative story about systematic problems at the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and reporter Tom Hallman took home the award in feature writing "for his poignant profile of a disfigured 14-year old boy who elects to have life-threatening surgery in an effort to improve his appearance."[415] Hallman had been a finalist in the beat reporting category in 1995 and in the feature writing category in 1999. The paper won accolades in the trade press, being described as one of the best newspapers in the country.[416] In 2008, *Editor & Publisher* selected Rowe and managing editor Bhatia as Editors of the Year.[417]

The *Oregonian's* success story was not only about narrative journalism. But developing and perfecting the narrative approach to daily storytelling in a major metropolitan newspaper was a crucial component in the *Oregonian*'s rise to fame. As indicated, the paper also benefitted from an emerging national movement towards narrative writing in movement.

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[414] Ibid., 8.

[415] http://www.oregonlive.com/editors/index.ssf/2013/04/the_oregonian_and_the_pulitzer.html. See also Sandy Rowe's perspective: "These two series [Hallman, INS] are very different—completely different subjects of course, calling for differing reporting methods, story structures and writing styles. One a serial written by a master of the journalistic narrative form, the other an exhaustively reported explanatory story with an investigative edge that shed light on an issue of complexity in a way only a newspaper can or will do. They had a lot in common, too. Both got to the heart of their subject matter and adhered to the highest journalistic standards." Sandra Mims Rowe, "Why Series Matter," *American Journalism Review* (September 2001), 40.

[416] Mark Lisheron, "Riding High," American Journalism Review (March 2000): 34; "10 That Do It Right," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 8, 2000.

[417] "Editors of the Year 2008: Sandy Rowe & Peter Bhatia," *Editor & Publisher*, Feb. 1, 2008.

The breadth and depth of this movement became more obvious in the mid-1990s when the National Writers Workshops came onto the scene.

The National Writing Scene

The National Writers Workshop started out in 1991 in Wilmington, Delaware when John Walston, then managing editor of the Wilmington News Journal, organized a writing weekend for journalists. Bestselling author James Mitchener was the keynote speaker as 325 participants sat in the audience.[418] Two years later the Poynter Institute came on board in and provided national direction for the locally organized writing weekends. That first year, more than 3,000 participants attended the events—all happening on the same weekend—in six locations. There were more than 180 speakers, and the average age of attendants was under 30.[419] Target audience were young journalists from small- and medium-sized newspapers. The idea behind the gatherings was to combine keynote speakers and panels with one-on-one coaching sessions conducted by volunteers from the sponsoring newspapers. In the course of five years, 15,000 journalists attended one of the NWW's regional sites and interacted with 1,200 featured speakers and workshop leaders.[420]

The mission of the workshops included to "create for journalists the best possible writing training at the lowest possible cost" and to "help participants feel part of a national community of writers."[421] In order to attract major newspapers as hosts, Poynter touted that organizing a workshop was a "relatively safe bet. The most successful site made about $20,000. The least successful lost about $6,000. The average site makes about $3,000."[422] A

[418] Winnie Hu, "The Training Track," *American Journalism Review* 21, no. 8 (1999): 56-65.
[419] *Workbench* 1995, The Poynter Institute.
[420] Roy Peter Clark, " A Few Tools from …", *The American Editor* (October/November 1998).
[421] Manuscript "National Writers' Workshop," n.d. [probably 1996 or 1997], The Poynter Institute, 2.
[422] Ibid, 3.

typical program had 24-32 speakers and workshop leaders. There were general sessions in a large auditorium, large breakouts featuring three parallel sessions and small breakouts of six parallel sessions. In addition, participants could sign up for 20-minute coaching sessions with senior writers from participating newspapers. Once a year, Poynter published "The Workbench," a newsletter containing highlights of the workshops, previews and, in the early years, articles about writing.

In 1998 the ASNE writing awards celebrated their 20th anniversary. Writing in The American Editor, Sandy Rowe, then the president of ASNE, praised Eugene Patterson for having established an institutional vehicle for recognizing excellent newspaper writing. Rowe also emphasized the importance of the Best Newspaper Writing anthologies: "In truth," she wrote, "these volumes are gems created to be mined and given away. They are loaded with inspiration from gifted writers. Copies should be in the hands of all reporters who aspire to write memorable and moving stories and on the minds of editors whose job it is to create the environment and teach the skills that allow reporters to do their best work."[423]
At this stage, the anthology had become more than a simple archive of award-winning journalism. It was strategically positioned to teach the next generation of journalists. As Roy Peter Clark and Christopher Scanlan wrote in the preface to the anniversary collection, "Our goal in collecting these pieces from the last 20 years of award winners was to provide students of journalism, from first semester news writing and reporting students to experienced working journalists, with exemplary and practical examples of the craft."[424]

Another indicator that narrative writing had achieved a critical mass was that the literary marketplace offered opportunities for practitioners and proponents of narrative

[423] Sandra Mims Rowe, "Awarding Good Writing: A Happy ASNE Mission," *American Editor* (March 1998), 2
[424] Roy Peter Clark, Christopher Scanlan and American Society of Newspaper Editors, *America's Best Newspaper Writing: A Collection of ASNE Prizewinners* (Bedford/St. Martin's, Boston, New York, 2001), iii.

writing to explain their craft and provide tools of instruction. Books about narrative writing and how-to-manuals became an important cottage industry and provided significant resources.[425]

A systematic and targeted look at various textbooks clearly indicated a change in attitude towards narrative journalism.[426] While early textbooks only briefly mentioned narrative writing (i.e. feature writing), later textbooks typically devoted entire sections to it. Furthermore, some later textbooks no longer made a distinction between news writing and feature writing and instead used the catch-all phrase of "storytelling." In general, instructions and tips for narrative writing became more comprehensive and specific. Another interesting finding was that many textbooks reflected on these changes in writing technique in their introductions. For example, I found multiple references to the opinion that in the 1970s newspapers came under a lot of pressure by television. As a consequence, according to this line of reasoning, newspapers had to make their content more entertaining and colorful which then led to heightened attention to writing technique.

Academic institutions, too, responded to an emerging interest in discussing and studying the practice of narrative journalism. In the fall of 1992, the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication inaugurated the first full-fledged master's program for narrative journalism, called a master's program in Literary Nonfiction, that was located in a journalism school. In 1998, the University of Missouri's School of Journalism organized a conference under the title of "Can Storytelling Save Newspapers?"[427] Boston University held annual conferences on narrative journalism initiated and organized by Mark

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[425] For example, Walt Harrington, *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997); Lee Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality* (Wiley Books for Writers Series. New York: Wiley, 1997).
[426] See methodology in Chapter III.
[427] Video Tape [VHS] – "Can Good Storytelling Save Newspapers?", Fisher Auditorium, October, 21, 1998. University Archives, University of Missouri, accessed February 9, 2017, http://muarchives.missouri.edu/c20-13-1_box_list.html

Kramer. While the Poynter Institute continued its efforts to promote and teach narrative writing both in St. Petersburg and through the National Writers Workshops, the American Press Institute also acknowledged the benefits of storytelling. Warren Watson, the director of API, wrote that he was "a new convert to the raw power and influence of this newspaper writing form." He urged editors to consider narrative journalism as an important strategy to engage readers, tell complex stories and boost morale in the newsroom. And he also added a business argument. "At a time," Warren wrote, "when newspapers are faced with more competition from print and electronic media, when readers say they have no time to read, editors and publishers can derive benefits from adopting narrative storytelling as a major form."[428]

The narrative conference at Boston University and then at Harvard hosted by the Nieman Foundation became the highlight of the narrative journalism scene. It lent legitimacy and prestige to narrative journalism as a craft and offered a platform to reflect on its theory, practice and ethics. Most importantly, it helped create a common identity both for participants as well as for journalists across the country who learned about the debates through trade publications, journals (*Nieman Reports*) and word of mouth. While the National Writers Workshops were focused on training the next generation, the conferences in Boston served as the forum for leading experts and practitioners in the field.[429]

In light of all these developments, Mark Kramer saw enough evidence for the claim that "narrative writing is returning to newspapers." He cited the Associated Press's enterprise reporting team, efforts at "a few dozen papers" to "identify and free up reporters with a storytelling knack" as well as the National Writers Workshops and the conference at Boston where "self-identified newsroom renegades" gathered. All taken together, he

[428] Warren Watson, "Narrative Style Adds Life to Your Pages," *The American Editor* (March/April 1999): 9; 11.
[429] Jacqui Banaszynksi, interview with the author, February 2, 2017

concluded, "an unofficial 'narrative movement' has coalesced."[430]

From these discussions among proponents and practitioners of narrative journalism certain themes emerged. Narrative journalism supported and expands the civic mission of newspapers. As Kramer argued, "narrative […] opens more material for reporting—the revealing, nuanced lives of not just the prominent, but of ordinary citizens."[431] For Madeleine Blais connected this approach had a clear democratic impetus. "Literary nonfiction has a deep American backbone, fixed in the democratic notion that real stories about real people are worth telling."

Discussions also revolved around resistance to storytelling in newspapers. Some participants were cautioning against overusing narrative. "We mislead our readers, however," William Woo said, "when in the name of producing an interesting story we superimpose an arbitrary order on an incomplete selection of facts and present it as the reality—as the what that happened. In doing so I think we also can mislead ourselves into imagining—and even worse, believing—that life divides neatly into beginnings, middles and ends and plots and characters that develop as events unfold."[432] Some audience members were concerned about the impact of emotional stories as they might lead to the "creation of an anecdotally driven public policy."[433]

Overall, however, the conference allowed practitioners and proponents to define the terms of narrative storytelling and moderate the tension between traditional newspaper values and the possibilities of narrative techniques. No single document or contribution could encapsulate the variety and multiplicity of approaches, but a particular eloquent example of encapsulating narrative journalism's appeal and promise came from Jacqui

[430] Mark Kramer, "Narrative Journalism Comes of Age," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 5.
[431] Mark Kramer, "Narrative Journalism Comes of Age," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 5.
[432] William F. Woo, "Just Write What Happened," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 16.
[433] "Talking about Narrative Journalism," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 20.

Banaszynski. It defines certain elements of storytelling and emphasizes how narrative journalism serves various purposes—communal, sensory, ethical and spiritual.

> Stories are our prayers, so write and edit and tell them with due reverence, even when the stories themselves are irreverent. Stories are parables. Write and edit and tell yours with meaning so each tale stands in for a larger message, each moment is a lesson, each story a guidepost on our collective journey.
> Stories are history; writer and edit and tell yours with accuracy, understanding and context and with unwavering devotion to the truth. Stories are music; write, edit and tell yours with pace and rhythm and flow throw in the dips and twirls that make them exciting, but stay true to the core beat. Remember that readers hear stories with their inner ear.
> Stories are our conscience; write and edit and tell yours with passion for the good they can do, the wrongs they can right, the truths they can teach, the unheard voice they can give sound to. And stories are memory; write and edit and tell yours with respect for the past they archive and for the future they enlighten.
> Finally, stories are our soul; so write and edit and tell | yours with your whole selves. Tell them as if they are all that matters, for if that is what you do—tell our collective stories—it matters that you do it as if that is all there is.[434]

Conclusion

This chapter reconstructed the emergence of a self-described national writing movement and how it expanded in the late 1980s and 1990s. It showed how editors and reporters embraced narrative writing as an important element of daily journalism in newspapers, how they strategically developed training tools as well as industry standards for best practices and how a national interpretive community around narrative writing emerged. This chapter also demonstrated how storytelling diversified and how narrative techniques found a place both in lifestyle sections and in news sections. Examining the success story of the *Oregonian*, this chapter identified what it looked like to develop and implement narrative journalism in a major newspaper in the 1990s. A key ingredient for *Oregonian*'s evolution to become a paper of storytellers was that the newspaper was an emerging infrastructure of

[434] "Why We Need Stories," *Nieman Reports* (Fall 2000): 42.

narrative journalist, writing coaches and proponents. Conventions, conferences and workshops further established an ecosystem for narrative writing and facilitated exchanges between seasoned authors and fledgling writers.

By the 1990s, narrative storytelling in newspapers had come of age. At the same time, resistance against narrative techniques in particular and storytelling in general had gained momentum, too. Against the backdrop of an ever-differentiating and ever-fragmenting media marketplace (especially once the digital revolution took shape), three themes emerged in this chapter, summarizing the evolution of narrative journalism in the 1990s.

First, as narrative writing expanded and matured it also diversified. Newspapers promoted both longform narratives and storytelling on deadline. Narrative writing moved into all sections of the newspaper while newspapers also developed sections that bundled consumer-oriented features and service journalism. In an effort to differentiate all of these emerging forms from traditional news reporting practitioners and scholars alike fell back to the default position of describing this distinction as one between hard news and soft news. Soft journalism became a convenient way to discredit anything that did not fit the traditional format of political or metro news. Nevertheless, as this chapter has shown, practitioners and proponents of narrative journalism actively and collectively built the case that there was a place for narrative journalism in daily newspapers.

Second, in developing and formulating standard practices for narrative journalism, reporters and editors realized that they needed to address ethical concerns and challenges. While the criticism of the Janet Cooke era had subsided, new instances of fraud and negligence sensitized practitioners to the pitfalls of narrative techniques. As a result, newspaper such as the *Oregonian* outlined policies and routines to minimize the risks of

transgressing journalistic conventions. In doing so, they demonstrated that journalistic norms, values and practices could be shaped to include interpretive, analytical and more subjective approaches to reporting and writing the news.

Finally, this chapter also highlighted that change in the newspaper industry was not limited to activities in individual organizations or companies. Rather, the evolution of such a community of practice was facilitated by the interplay of individual actors, nonprofits such as the Poynter Institute, academic institutions and major universities. As they were developing narrative journalism as a standard practice of daily work at newspapers, journalists and editors actually felt that something in journalism was changing, that opportunities for narrative writing were expanding. While this transformation was fueled from many sources, it helped create a collective identity of narrative journalists. Far from being relegated to the fringes, narrative journalists now played an important role in the daily news production.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

When editors and journalists adapted narrative journalism in daily newspaper between the 1960s and the early 2000s, they responded to a variety of cultural and institutional influences and then developed a narrative news logic to mediate and channel these influences. Eventually, narrative journalism took shape as a distinct "cultural form of news," adding a novel way of reporting and writing the news in daily newspapers. This complex and multi-faceted process cannot be reduced to a simplistic cause and effect model. In part, the evolution of narrative journalism grew out of changing pressures on the news industry as a whole. In the 1960s and 1970s, journalists were coming to terms with changing lifestyles and the end of the New Deal consensus. In the 1980s, economic transformations and new business realities created opportunities for narrative storytelling but also pushed journalistic writing more towards commercial objectives. In the 1990s, when Americans were experiencing affluence and abundance after the Cold War had ended, journalism was exposed to and contributed to the mediatization of public life. Against this backdrop of both gradual and decisive social, economic, political and cultural changes in the United States, narrative journalism expanded the scope and mission of what journalists were doing. In addition to the traditional objective of journalism to answer the question of "What happened?", narrative techniques allowed reporters and editors to address the questions "What does it mean?" and "How does it feel?".

The previous three chapters identified a variety of ideas and motivations that journalists invoked as they explained how and why the content of newspapers needed narrative elements. In the first section of this conclusion, I summarize the results and discuss

them in the three areas that I have outlined in the theory chapter: journalism as a cultural institution, journalism as a regime, journalism as a news logic. In the second section, I review specific themes that emerged from my research and contextualize them within the field of journalism studies. In the final section, I reflect on the role of narrative writing in the digital age.

The Impact of Narrative Journalism

Narrative Journalism as a Cultural Institution

Between the 1960s and the 2000s journalists actively reinterpreted what journalism could do as a cultural institution. They often referred to the changing lifestyles of their readers in order to justify and promote new forms of reporting and writing. In a way, lifestyle became a heuristic to talk about social, economic, political and cultural shifts as journalists reacted to broad and fundamental changes in American society between the 1960s and the early 2000s. Lifestyles changed significantly during these decades and narrative journalism offered tools to address and understand these transformations.

In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, editors and journalists saw narrative journalism as a technique to analyze, explain and illuminate issues such as racial inequality, the women's movement and youth culture. But an emphasis on lifestyles also included examining the growing suburbanization of the country, the private sides of public figures and collective phenomena such as trends towards self-fulfillment, spirituality and religion. Of course, social analysis and commentary had been important elements of journalism before, but now they took the form of narrative storytelling (not just essays and editorials) and found a place in daily newspapers (and not just books and magazines). This explanatory function of narrative journalism further developed in the 1980s as journalists were trying to

go beyond the dichotomy of being either an obedient press or an adversary press. Narrative journalism was presented as an effective way to illustrate social and political issues as they affected ordinary people. Journalists argued that good narrative writing served democracy because it highlighted the complexity of politics and how it affected people, something that could not be captured by solely focusing on government and institutional actors. By the 1990s, narrative journalism had been widely accepted as an exemplary way to humanize the news and illuminate universal issues of everyday life.

In retrospect, cultural historians and sociologists have identified a confluence of factors underlying these cultural changes that journalists were dealing with in the last quarter of the 20th century. The US experienced growing economic prosperity from 1946 to 1973, suffered through a malaise in the 1970s and then picked up the economic expansion interrupted by recession years.[435] The postwar economic boom and the GI bill laid the groundwork for expanding academic opportunities and access to education and training. Americans became better educated.[436] The shape and structure of American families changed. Women entered the workforce, yet without a reinterpretation of the role of motherhood.[437] Following the civil rights era, the US became a more diverse society. Americans were increasingly targeted as consumers and consequently developed attitudes and behaviors that prioritized consumption and self-fulfillment.[438] Americans became more critical of institutions. All of these changes meant that journalists had to engage with their audiences in different ways. Narrative journalism was one of the strategies with which reporters and editors contributed to this response.

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435 Jama Lazerow, "1960-1974," in *A Companion to 20th-Century America*, ed. Stephen J. Whitfield (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 91.
436 Schudson, *Rise of the Right to Know.*
437 Robert O. Self, *All in the Family.*
438 Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*; Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

Narrative Journalism as a News Regime

In addition to these larger transformations of American society, editors and reporters were also dealing with specific institutional dynamics within the news industry between the 1960s and the 1990s. The most important developments in journalism and also the most significant factors contributing to the evolution of narrative journalism were the rise of television and the corporatization of newspapers. As the previous chapters have shown, editors and reporters were not passive victims of these trends but actively mediated and channeled them according to their own ideas. Editors developed creative strategies (in accordance with or tolerated by) their publishers to modernize their papers and narrative journalism became a significant part of this endeavor. However, narrative journalists only emerged gradually from their outsider status ("renegades," "weirdoes") towards being accepted and appreciated for their journalistic work. Fighting the stigma of producing "soft news," they created conditions for a different kind of journalism. Eventually, institutional support (ASNE, training institutions like Poynter) elevated individual initiatives to a critical level and helped disseminate models, templates and exemplars for practicing narrative journalism in daily newspapers. After initial skepticism towards the influence of outside actors (e.g. towards college professors as writing coaches), journalists and editors for the most part embraced a culture of learning that was sustained by writing coaches, consultants and training programs both within newsrooms and industry-wide. The role of the American Society of Newspaper Editors cannot be overstated because, by bridging organizational divides and rivalries, it provided resources, justification and incentives for narrative journalism across the country. Events like the annual ASNE conference and initiatives such as writing contests played an important role in creating an institutional infrastructure for

narrative journalists to learn from each other and develop shared norms, values and practices. In addition, publications such as the ASNE *Bulletin*, *Editors' Exchange* and *Coaches' Corner* validated the practice of narrative writing in daily newspapers and allowed the narrative news logic to gain traction in the industry. Industry-sponsored audience and reception studies also contributed to increasing the appeal of narrative journalism in newspapers. Even though storytelling did not turn out to be the silver bullet for saving newspapers that many were hoping for, it clearly resonated with readers and expanded the range of reasons why people read their newspapers. Time and time again, readers responded enthusiastically to well-done narrative journalism and urged newspapers to do more. Despite these positive contributions of narrative journalism, however, institutional pressures also led to a certain deformation of the narrative ethos. Faced with business pressures and driven by shallow entertainment values, narrative journalism sometimes also became a cookie cutter approach to enliven the news. Moreover, recurring scandals and individual transgressions of journalists highlighted the pitfalls of a narrative approach.

Narrative Journalism as News Logic

Narrative journalism has a long history but it was only in the last quarter of the 20th century that American newspapers widely adopted its techniques for the daily production of news. How did the narrative news logic emerge? How did new conventions of form and style affect practices and how did new practices offer opportunities for creating innovative expressions of form and style? As the previous chapters have shown, reporters and editors "rediscovered" narrative techniques for a variety of reasons. Often, driving forces were their individual interests in reading and writing as well as some desire to combine journalistic work with literary flair. Many of these newspaper journalists found inspiration in the New

Journalists who themselves had found inspiration in the short stories of fiction writers or the older traditions of realism and naturalism from the 19th century. They were drawing from a rich literary tradition based on what Thomas Connery called the "paradigm of actuality."[439]

Yet, despite these literary precursors and the appeal of the New Journalism, the newspaper world presented significant challenges for practicing narrative journalism. This environment was very different from the free-wheeling magazine world or the more eclectic publishing industry. Newspapers were an industrially manufactured product that had to be created and delivered daily. Its routines were based on technology that had not changed much in decades and on an occupational ideology that prioritized objectivity and detachment. The language was expedient if not always efficient and for the most part not literary. If journalism was an "industrial art" (James Carey), then journalists had to satisfy both the "industrial" and the "art" part.

Reporters and editors looked for different ways of telling newspaper stories and found examples in magazines, books and the alternative press. They adopted reporting strategies and writing techniques that were familiar in other areas of the literary world but then used them in the daily newspaper production. While the form of narrative nonfiction was circulating in a variety of literary fields, journalists needed to actualize its potential for the daily news production, i.e. reconcile the requirements of narrative technique with the necessity of producing a daily newspaper under the norms, values and practices that come with it. There was no preexisting consensus about what this narrative news logic could and should look like. There was no established terminology to describe this emerging form of news. Some called their stories features, others referred to a variety of names such as trend stories, takeouts and mood pieces when they were in fact practicing narrative journalism.

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[439] Connery, *Journalism and Realism*.

Some described their craft as writing nonfiction short stories, others wanted to create a newspaper that was more like a daily magazine. Narrative journalism in newspapers developed in a fluid way and emerged gradually from experimentation with storytelling formats. As a result, narrative journalism attracted individual writers by the possibility to do artistic work and use creativity, imagination and craftsmanship.

To make this text genre viable, journalists had to adapt, expand or break with traditional reporting techniques. Narrative journalism required a significant amount of legwork and the use of reporting skills that went beyond retrieving information through quick interviews. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, reporters often immersed themselves in subcultures and spent significant amounts of time with the subjects of their stories. In addition to establishing the facts, reporters strove to explore the meaning of events and experiences they were covering. To build trust and relationships with their sources, they had to show empathy and trust their own emotional response, a very different approach from the detached reporter who was supposed to stay above the fray. In turn, these new reporting techniques expanded the stylistic variety of journalistic writing while staying within the boundaries of nonfiction writing and respecting the ethics of daily journalism. In order to write like novelists, journalists had to think like fiction writers, yet at the same time, also back up their observations with evidence from their reporting.

The narrative approach to news writing affected all aspects of journalists' work: story selection, reporting, interviewing and writing. As such it constituted a different kind of journalistic epistemology[440] and ultimately led to an emerging framework of norms, values and beliefs. Initially, the narrative news logic was developing in various newsrooms for a variety of reasons. Over time, these practitioners learned of each other and fostered

[440] Wahl-Jorgensen, "Strategic Ritual," 139.

relationships and networks. As a result, they developed best practices, built a body of collective knowledge and defined their own set of techniques. Ultimately, they not only expanded the range and content of daily journalism but also its objectives. The purpose was not just to inform the audience but to "stimulate readers, move them emotionally and call them to action."[441] Narrative journalism in newspapers became a journalistic genre that resonated with readers and gained prominence on award committees and across the industry. Journalists had become not just the chroniclers but also "novelists of their time."[442]

Explaining the Narrative Turn

My focus on describing and explaining the rediscovery of narrative journalism in American newspaper emphasized the motivations, aspirations and objectives of journalists who actively (if not always consciously) developed narrative techniques in daily news writing. In doing so, I highlighted cultural and institutional dynamics contributing to the interpretive turn in American journalism and the narrative turn in American news writing. In this section I discuss how the findings of my study support previous interpretations but also challenge common beliefs about the evolution and nature of narrative journalism. First I address general explanations for the emergence of narrative and/or interpretive reporting. Then I zero in on common judgments (the softening of journalism, the commercialization of journalism) attributed to these transformations.

Some scholars have pegged the emergence of narrative and interpretive journalisms to specific events in American postwar history. For example, Davies writes, "In content, newspapers began a long, slow journey to update their methods of reporting. The most significant trend during the two decades [after 1945] was the movement toward

[441] Hart, *Second Takes* 1, no. 1 (May 1989): 1.
[442] Tom Wicker, "The Greening of the Press," *Columbia Journalism Review* 10, no. 1 (May/June 1971): 12.

interpretation of the news. Rooted in the 1930s, interpretation spread in the 1950s as a response to the sensational rise of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy."[443] While it is important to acknowledge the significance of certain events and personalities, a complex process like the emergence of narrative journalism can hardly be reduced to being a specific response to such events and personalities. It seems doubtful that the role of a single politician can explain broad trends as the evolution of interpretive journalism.

Barnhurst puts forward a philosophical argument based on this empirical research and argues that news changed from a realist to a modernist paradigm.

> The reasons for what happened to U.S. news content are complex, at times changes emerged from occupational conditions and ambitions for those creating news, at times from the economic context for news organs and their goods, at times from the political moves of parties and editors in relation to partisanism, at times from the responses of audiences and publics, and at times from technical changes that seemed to intervene on their own. The causes worked in concert as well as alone—but also in conflict—across the levels of social analysis, and the power relations among levels had critical consequences. Viewing the competing forces using the lens of modernism assumes that they worked through the symbols and representations available in culture. In that sense, news played a central role in creating the modern world of the twentieth century.[444]

Barnhurst acknowledges complexity, yet also applies abstract constructs such as modernism to account for the changes in American journalism. He detects a shift from realism to modernism, claiming that journalists actually neglected narrative traditions of realism and instead promoted a modernist form of news—some kind of detached scientism as Barnhurst's describes it. This news practice, he argues, "resisted efforts to realign news with human expression."[445] My interpretation differs in that I attempted to show how traditional forms of storytelling did not vanish but were rediscovered and reinterpreted in

[443] Davies, *The Postwar Decline*, 129.
[444] Barnhurst, *Mr. Pulitzer*, 231.
[445] Ibid., 227.

the context of an increasingly competitive journalistic marketplace, responding to larger cultural trends. Moreover, one of the key features of narrative journalism, its emphasis on humanizing the news, actually helped "to realign news with human expression" (see below). I am also more skeptical than Barnhurst that grand explanatory concepts such as "realism" or "modernism" alone are sufficient or desirable to examine complex phenomena such as the expansion of interpretive journalism.

For Fink and Schudson, the rise of interpretive and explanatory reporting in U.S. journalism had to do with "general cultural explanations—growing professionalism, growing skepticism, and a growing pride in independence—rather than a specific focus on investigative and even 'adversarial' reporting from the Vietnam-to-Watergate era on."[446] Yet another set of scholars view narrative journalism as a universal genre that comes and goes in cycles. "The reportage genre," argues Steensen, "is perhaps the oldest and throughout the history of journalism most sustainable journalistic genre."[447] As the New Journalism emerged in the 1960s, "history would repeat itself when journalists like Tom Wolfe and Gay Talese once again challenged mainstream factual and objective news."[448]

I subscribe both to the universal importance of storytelling and the validity of general cultural explanations. However, a major objective of this study was to demonstrate the specific impact of journalists and how they mediate and channel institutional and cultural dynamics. Echoing an earlier point, my analysis is based on the view that journalists are "cultural mediators" whose "social practice is intimately tied to historical needs, options, and opportunities."[449]

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446 Fink and Schudson, "The Rise of Contextual Journalism," 15.
447 Steen Steensen, "The Intimization of Journalism," in *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*, ed. Tamara Witschge (London: Sage, 2016), 120-21.
448 Ibid., 121.
449 Wilson, *Labor of Words*, xii.

The findings of this dissertation also provide context to the emergence of narrative news reporting in relation to the New Journalism. By adopting narrative strategies, newspapers created space for personal, subjective and interpretive writing that incorporated some of the techniques and practices of the New Journalists without giving in to some of their excesses. However, my analysis also challenges the popular belief that a few talented New York reporters (Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, Gay Talese, Joan Didion and others) revolutionized journalism by deciding to employ storytelling techniques in their writing. As illustrated by Daly, for example, who writes "By the end of the 1960s the movement was starting to reach escape velocity. In part the success of what was coming to be known as the New Journalism was due to the sheer talent of its founders. They inherited a problem in their field, which was becoming set in its ways, and they tackled it with style and verve." [450] Ultimately the findings of this study indicate that the evolution of narrative in late twentieth century American journalism was more nuanced, more purposeful and more institutionally based than the New Journalism myth suggests.

Humanizing the News and the Role of Emotions

An important motivation for practicing narrative journalism and implementing it in the daily newspaper production was journalists' desire to humanize the news. They were interested in telling stories about people and how they lived their lives. They wanted to explore the emotional core of how events and experiences affected people in their attitudes and their behavior. Their goal was to engage readers not only with reports that informed their minds but with stories that touched their hearts.

[450] Daly, *Covering America*, 341.

This emphasis on the emotional aspects of news stories was a recurring theme in the evolution of narrative storytelling in American newspapers. As Tom Kendrick described this approach for the *Washington Post* Style section, "Style's focus is squarely on the human dimension, a dimension that somehow got cut wafer-thin in the who-what-when-where-why formula that seemed nearly computer programmed by the '60s. Now, as these stories document, Style writers are striving to gather facts without excising their human context, freeze-drying their emotional impact."[451] Emphasizing the human context and the emotional impact was fully supported by the *Post's* executive editor Ben Bradlee. He wanted his reporters and editors to focus on people and, in the case of the Washington power elite, to explore the private sides of public officials, their emotional lives and their avocations.[452]

Narrative journalism with its use of literary techniques provided reporters with effective tools to capture the emotional side of news. For Richard Zahler, one of the ASNE award winners and later a writing coach at the *Seattle Times*, the emotional experience of literature was an important factor in creating narrative news stories. "I'm a strong believer in story telling as story telling," he said. "The thing has got to move and develop. It's got to have detail and real people and feeling and emotion. You've got to work hard to get what you need: what people wear, what happens to their faces when a certain emotion occurs."[453] When Roy Peter Clark analyzed award-winning stories from the first few years of the ASNE writing contest, he highlighted this sensitivity towards the emotional elements of news stories as one of the most important characteristics of good writers in journalism. "They are in constant search for the human side of the news," he noted.

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[451] Kendrick, "Introduction," 22.
[452] Shelby Coffey, interview with the author, September 5, 2015.
[453] Clark, *Best Newspaper Writing 1981*, 74.

A good illustration of what it meant to put emotion into narrative stories can be gleaned from Jack Hart. Writing after Sandy Rowe had taken over as the editor of the *Oregonian*, he informed the newsroom that she wanted more emotion in the newspaper. "To deliver what she wants," he wrote, "most of us have to work a lot harder at capturing the humanity that's missing in the typical news story." Then he offered two tests that reporters could use to determine whether their writing illuminated the emotional dimensions of their news stories. The first test for reporters was to ask themselves whether they "introduce[d] us to a sympathetic character being involved in an emotional situation." Then they should evaluate whether they were "evoking the kind of detail that allows readers to get close enough to feel emotion directly. Emotion, as it turns out, cannot be felt secondhand."[454] Hart further underscored this latter aspect when he laid out the specific techniques that narrative writers use to convey emotion and meaning. "[T]hese writers seldom bother to tell us what anything means. They get out of the way and let the action line wend its own way through the unadorned descriptive detail. They point you in the right direction and let you experience the emotion yourself, which is the only way you *can* experience emotion. And, in the end, you know exactly what everything means. You can *feel* it."[455]

One of the writers at the Oregonian who was and still is considered a master the art of telling emotional stories is Tom Hallman. He fully embraced an emotional approach to reporting and writing the news.

> As a writer, I think I am an emotional writer, and I want to make my readers feel the same emotions I felt when I was out doing this story and so then I want to use words or scenes to recreate that same feeling in my readers. I view myself as a guide taking a reader by the hand and saying, "Come enter my world and let me show you around." In some stories I open the door very wide for a reader to come in and live with the person and in others I feel like I am taking them through an apartment house just opening one door at a time and letting them look into the room briefly

[454] Hart, *Second Takes* 5, no. 6 (October 1993): 2.
[455] Ibid., 3.

> and then moving on to another door. So when I'm reporting, I'm very aware of how I feel, and I've learned to trust my voice. As I'm out there reporting I think, "This scene make me feel that way. Why am I feeling that way? And then looking for the details that I can use to make someone who is not there see the same way I did.[456]

Emphasizing the emotional components of storytelling in daily news production often presented obstacles for narrative journalists. Whenever editors and reporters introduced narrative techniques in newsrooms, they faced (in varying degrees) opposition and resentment. Narrative journalism was often considered "soft" journalism and denounced as fluffy. "Real" journalism was supposed to chronicle the activities of government and other institutions in the community. A false dichotomy between information and entertainment permeated many newsrooms as many practitioners thought that journalism could only do either one or the other. Narrative journalism, however, subverted these distinctions and demonstrated that informative content can also be enjoyable and entertaining to read.

Practitioners were not alone in struggling with this tension and the peculiar dynamics between content and form. The notion that anything that digressed from straight-forward, dry news reporting about civic issues was deplorable, had also taken hold in academe. In particular, scholars routinely dismissed the role of emotions as either not relevant or deplorable. As Peters observes, "the concept of 'emotion' is often treated dismissively; a marker of unprincipled and flawed journalism." Yet, this discourse is misguided, he argues. "It rests on an undertheorized conceptualization of emotion that is employed with commonsensical discernment, conflated with tabloid practices, sensationalism, bias,

[456] American Society of Newspaper Editors. Convention. *ASNE: Proceedings of the 1997 Convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, 221.

commercialization, and the like."[457] Against this backdrop, it is important to highlight that narrative journalism has added a specific form of emotional involvement to American news writing.

One indicator that narrative journalism has pushed the envelope on humanizing the news can be seen in an analysis by Wahl-Jorgensen. Examining Pulitzer award-winning news stories between 1995 and 2011 she detected a "strategic ritual of emotionality," in other words "an institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists narrating and infusing their reporting with emotion"[458] In doing so, "journalists rely on outsourcing of emotional labor to non-journalists—the story protagonists who are (a) authorized to express emotions in public, and (b) whose emotions journalists can authoritatively describe without implicating themselves."[459]

The findings of this dissertation both support and challenge Wahl-Jorgensen's assessment. Narrative journalism, I would argue, provided the very tools for "an institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists narrating and infusing their reporting with emotion." However, while the expression of emotions is "heavily policed and disciplined" in many areas of news production, narrative journalism subverted this logic because it actively encouraged journalists to become personally and emotionally involved. Actually, as the previous examples have shown, journalists embraced this emotional involvement. For many of them, emotional involvement and emotional expression were intertwined through the practice of narrative reporting and writing.

One of the biggest challenges in studying the form of news is that much of recent scholarship utilizes vague and simplistic definitions of journalistic storytelling. All too often,

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[457] Chris Peters, "Emotion Aside or Emotional Side? Crafting an 'Experience of Involvement' in the News," *Journalism* 13, no. 3 (2011), 298.
[458] Wahl-Jorgensen, "Strategic Ritual," 130.
[459] Ibid.

the form of news and its inherent properties are assumed in an a priori way. Alternative forms of news that do not align with common notions of a particular and historically contingent form of hard news are sweepingly disqualified as soft news, infotainment or human interest stories. Here is just one such example but it is symptomatic. Benson defines his use of narrative journalism thusly: "I aim to call attention to journalistic construction of articles as 'human interest stories' told about non elite individuals, generally beginning with the lead paragraphs, whose form tends to work against substantial structural analysis or juxtaposition of opposing viewpoints."[460] In Benson's view, human interest stories are inherently incapable of adding social, political or philosophical analysis to the depictions of personal experiences. It is not my intention to dispute that an abundance of so called human interest stories lack additional layers of analysis. Yet, an across-the-board assessment like Benson's does not pay enough attention to the nuances in style and form. In contrast to reifying the dichotomy and hierarchy between hard news and human interest stories, the findings of this historical study suggest that news content, borrowing a concept from G. Stuart Adam, runs on a spectrum between two poles: civic and human interest. Adam distinguishes these two kinds of stories in the following way: "the civic, having to do with politics, the conduct of public business, and the administration of society's major institutions and systems; and the human interest, having to do with events in the lives of individuals and the community of souls."[461] While there are certainly more or less pure forms of each kind of story, there is also a wide variety of stories combining the personal with the political, human interest with civic debate, the particular and the universal.

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[460] Benson, *Shaping Immigration News*, 12.
[461] G. Stuart Adam, *Notes Towards a Definition of Journalism: Understanding an Old Craft as an Art Form*, Poynter Papers, no. 2 (St. Petersburg: Poynter Institute for Media Studies, 1993), 24-25.

Finally, narrative journalism's greatest asset—and sometimes its biggest liability—lies in its ability to strategically engage readers by expressing emotion. That requires a specific skill set. As George Gertschow put it in his introduction to The Best American Narratives 2012, "The best nonfiction narratives have an emotional goal—to move people and effect change. The can only happen when the story connects with the deepest core of a reader's psychological and spiritual being. The connection must be strong and deeply felt, forming an emotional bond between the writer, the reader, and the subject. Making that connection may be the hardest part of the narrative craft."[462]

Business Pressures

Recent scholarship analyzing changes in the journalism industry shows a remarkable consensus in arguing that in response to an intensely competitive media environment and abundant sources of entertainment, news outlets increasingly relied on soft and sensationalist news content. Consider this example from Ryfe: "From the 1930s to the 1970s, when journalists enjoyed their greatest autonomy from commercial pressures, hard news dominated the front pages of most newspapers around the country. But, as journalists sought to give readers more of what they wanted in the news, softer news followed."[463] While it is indisputable that the commercial pressure on media organizations and journalists has increased over the past decades, its impact on the actual form and content of journalism is open for debate. Certainly there was a change in newspaper content but, as the previous chapters indicate, this shift was not solely driven by business pressures. Future research might be able to specifically examine and pinpoint the actual impact of business pressures on

[462] George Getschow, "Introduction," *The Best American Narratives of 2012*, eds. George Gertschow and Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012).
[463] Ryfe, *Can Journalism Survive,* 43.

the form and style of news. Economic considerations, as particularly chapter V has shown, led to a lighter fare in feature sections. At the same time, investing resources in programs for writing improvement also enabled newsrooms to actually elevate the quality of their news content.

Conceptualizing the journalistic marketplace has been done from two perspectives: media economics and political economy. Despite their philosophical and methodological differences, both disciplines provide models to examine how business pressures impact journalistic practice. According to Picard's definition, "Media economics is concerned with how media operators meet the informational and entertainment wants and needs of audiences, advertisers, and society with available resources. It deals with factors influencing production of media goods and services and the allocation of those products for consumption."[464] Media economists point out that the journalistic marketplace has special characteristics that distinguish it from other businesses.[465] They identify particular areas in which the logic of the marketplace has a noticeable influence on journalistic practices. For example, competition (or the lack thereof) has a significant impact on the content of media in general and newspapers in particular.[466]

Scholars of political economy examine the political and regulatory conditions of the media market and typically take a more critical stance. The view of McChesney is representative: "It is not that owners and advertisers and managers need to directly interfere with or censor editors and journalists; it is more the case that organizational structures

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[464] Robert G. Picard, *Media Economics: Concepts and Issues* (New York: Sage Publications, 1987), 7.
[465] Ibid.; Robert G. Picard, *The Economics and Financing of Media Companies,* second ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).
[466] Wayne Wanta and Thomas Johnson, "Content Changes in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* During Different Market Situations," *Journal of Media Economics* 7, no. 1 (1994); Stephen Lacy and Lucinda Davenport, "Daily Newspaper Market Structure, Concentration, and Competition," *Journal of Media Economics* 7, no. 3 (1994).

transmit values that are internalized by those who successfully rise to the top."[467] McChesney problematizes the "capitalist media setup" and the "ideology of professional journalism." He identifies three major biases of the professional media: They are blind in terms of how they select their stories; they avoid contextualization; and they are inherently pro-corporate. This, in his view, obscures the power relations in society rather than highlighting them. And the system is so rewarding for individual journalists, he alleges, that they only seldom step out of it. "[T]he great work [of journalists] has been done not because of the system as much as in spite of it."[468]

My study did not examine narrative journalism on a level of analysis that would be appropriate or suitable for exploring how and to which extent commercial pressures led to "soft news" in the form of narrative writing. First of all, as indicated above, it is not always clear what constitutes soft news. Second, the complaint of commercialization carries specific undertones. McManus defines commercialization as "any action intended to boost profit that interferes with a journalist's or news organization's best effort to maximize public understanding of those issues and events that shape the community they claim to serve."[469] From the perspective of narrative reporters and editors, the main goal of their endeavor was certainly not to boost profit. Nevertheless, they often made the argument that narrative journalism, by maximizing "public understanding of those issues and events that shape the community" *also* helped to boost circulation. Thus, they used business arguments to sell their approach to management and justify what they were doing. And numerous examples attest

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[467] Robert W. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 129.
[468] Ibid., 38.
[469] John H. McManus, "The Commercialization of News," in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, eds. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2009), 219.

to the immediate positive economic effects (circulation) of deeply-researched, well-written story projects.

American journalism, as Christopher Daly put it, is "a cultural enterprise lodged inside a business enterprise."[470] Therefore scholarship should be sensitive to acknowledge both elements and differentiate between cultural influences and business imperatives. It is also important not to fall back to a false dichotomy, prioritizing one or the other. American newspapers in the late 20th century faced competition from other media and a wide array of additional entertainment option. But editorial autonomy exerted influence and launched specific content innovations. Narrative journalism was one of them.

My analysis does not refute the findings of political economists who studied commodification of news and the ideological consequences of a capitalistic market logic. Nevertheless, my findings suggest that despite increasing pressures to give in to business imperatives, newsrooms of various sizes and across the country found ways to exert relative autonomy. Moreover, as Robert Picard has noted, American newspapers in the late twentieth century were experiencing an "unusually lucrative"[471] environment. It is unclear whether narrative journalism actually made newspapers more profitable. But the profitability of newspapers certainly supported and sustained ambitious projects of narrative journalism.

Narrative Writing in the Digital Age

Ever since the 1950s, newspapers were confronted with a *relative* loss of readership. But then the digital revolution brought about an *absolute* decline in readers and the collapse of newspapers' advertising business. As technological change accelerated and the Internet

[470] Daly, *Covering America*, ix.
[471] Robert Picard, "Twilight or New Dawn of Journalism? Evidence from the Changing News Ecosystem," *Journalism Studies* 15, no. 5 (2014): 501.

expanded through the late 1990s and early 2000s, newspapers were initially confident to ride out the storm of adjustment. But then in 2008, they hit rock bottom and started cutting costs across the board. As Paul Starr observed in 2009, "Newspapers are also shrinking in numbers of pages, breadth of news coverage, features of various kinds, and home delivery of print editions. All over America, as newspaper revenues plummet—by the end of 2008, ad sales were down about 25 percent from three years earlier—publishers cannot seem to shed editors, reporters, and sections of their papers fast enough."[472] Looking back at "Ten Years that Shook the Media World," Nielsen writes, "The expansion of options has led to an erosion of the everyday audience of most individual media outlets across most platforms, pressuring sales and advertising revenues for commercial providers, especially in mature markets with limited growth—in some cases to an extent that has jeopardised [sic] sustainability or forced severe cost-cutting."[473]

Narrative writing, as other forms of journalism, had to adapt to this changing media environment. Consequently, journalists and editors began experimenting with storytelling formats that combined narrative writing with multimedia elements. An early, and very successful example, was Mark Bowden's "Black Hawk Down" in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. The story was conceptualized as a series for the newspaper but then also adopted and expanded for the web.[474] Eventually, narrative stories were developed in a collaborative process between journalists and programmers. A ground-breaking example was "Snow Fall," a production by the *New York Times* that combined narrative journalism with digital elements (graphics, animations, video, photo, audio) into an immersive media experience. The story

[472] Paul Starr, "Goodbye to the Age of Newspapers" *New Republic*, March 3, 2009.
[473] Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Ten Years that Shook the Media World* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journlaism, 2012), 3.
[474] http://inquirer.philly.com/packages/somalia/sitemap.asp

was both a commercial and a critical success. The website received 2.9 million visits for more than 3.5 million page views and the story won the Pulitzer Award in Feature writing in 2013. "To make this news story a reality," wrote Nikki Usher, "the old skills of a narrative journalist were combined with new storytelling abilities that relied on knowledge of code and a deft understanding of how to think about creating content for the new capacities of the web."[475]

The presence of narrative stories is not limited to sophisticated multimedia presentations. News outlets still pursue and promote narrative writing as an end in itself. For example, when *The New York Times* published a special section featuring "The Most Read, Shared & Viewed Stories of 2016" almost all the stories in the 24-page spread were pieces of narrative journalism. One could read narratives about the outgoing president and the incoming one, the consequences of war abroad and social division at home, science stories and arts stories.[476]

The community of practice has changed and adopted as well. Boston University continues to organize a conference focused on "The Power of Narrative" but the program casts a wide net in capturing narrative journalism in the digital age.[477] Presentations and workshops not only focus on narrative writing but also on podcasts and documentary film-making. The Mayborn Institute organizes a "Best American Newspaper Writing Contest" and publishes award-winning stories in anthologies.[478] Digital start-ups are tapping into the

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[475] Nikki Usher, *Interactive Journalism: Hackers, Data, and Code* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 1.
[476] Michael D. Shear, "Obama at Night: 7 Almonds and Solitude," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, 3; Jason Horowitz, "A King in His Castle: How Trump Lives," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, 4; Jodi Kantor and Catrin Einhorn, "Refugees Hear a Foreign Word: Welcome," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, 6-7; John Eligon and Robert Gebeloff, "Segregation, the Neighbor That Won't Leave," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017,10-11; Gina Kolata, "That Lost Weight? The Body Finds It, Even for the 'Biggest Loser'," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, 16-17; Amanda Hess, "We Will Not Be Ignored," *New York Times*, January 1, 2017, 21.
[477] http://www.bu.edu/com/narrative/
[478] http://www.themayborn.com/best-american-newspaper-narrative-writing-contest

archives of narrative journalism and also curating narrative stories from a variety of online sources.[479]

[479] longform.org, longreads.com STRONGER STATEMENT

CHAPTER VIII

EPILOGUE

Narrative journalism has not gone away. Stories have not gone away. But as the newspaper infrastructure has collapsed, narrative journalism is evolving into new formats and narrative journalists are exploring new platforms.

But as technology keeps transforming the media landscape, the demand for storytelling is only going to increase, argues author and journalist Susan Orlean.

> Journalism is dead. Publishing is dead. Book – dead. Newspapers – really dead. Magazines – life support. Anyway, that's what we hear. […] But, in the face of all that, the one interesting thing that you never hear – no matter how dire these predictions are of what's going on in the world of writing – no one ever says that stories are dead. Never. No one ever says that storytelling is dead. I think stories and storytelling are thriving like they've never thrived before. I think that there's an appetite for stories that is far greater than it's ever been. [480]

[480] Key note lecture at the conference "The Power of Narrative". Boston, April 30, 2011. Personal recording.

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